GURPS® Fourth Edition

How to Be a GURPS GM™

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Contents

Introduction 4
Who Is Kromm? 4
About the Author 4

1. Preparing for Adventure 5
Important Resources for Preparing the Adventure 5
The ***Basic Set*** 5
Other ***GURPS*** Books 6
Other Books 8
GURPS Character Assistant 8
Online 8
Laying the Foundation 8
Importance of Communication 8
Fun for Everyone 9
Choosing a Genre 9
Choosing a Style 10
Cinematic Rules 10
Choosing a Power Level 11
Character Traits 12
Competing Disadvantages 12
Wealth and Status 13
Character Points in Play 14
Die Rolls in Play 15
Using the Campaign Planning Form 15
Character Creation 15
Character Concepts 15
Using Templates 16
Who Spends the Points? 16
Final Review 16

2. Example of Adventure Preparation 17
Important Resources: Example 17
Laying the Foundation: Example 17
Why Fantasy? 18
Character Creation: Example 18
Character Templates 18
Character Concepts: Example 18
Guard 19
Archer 20
Final Review: Example 21

3. Creating the Adventure 23
Important Resources for Creating the Adventure 23
The ***Basic Set*** 23
Other Books 23
Campaign Advice 23
Encounters: Things to Do 23
Rules Likely to Come Up 23
Something for Everyone 24
Player Freedom 25
Following the Players' Lead 25
NPCs: People to Meet 26
NPCs Are People, Too 26
Balancing NPCs With the Party 26
Sample Low-Tech Guards/Thugs/Soldiers 28
Settings: Places to See 29
Combat Environment 29
Setting Variety 30
Putting It on Paper 30
The Plot 30
The NPCs 31
Encounters and Scenes 31
Possible Outcomes 31

About *GURPS*

Steve Jackson Games is committed to full support of ***GURPS*** players. Our address is SJ Games, P.O. Box 18957, Austin, TX 78760. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) any time you write us! We can also be reached by e-mail: **info@sjgames.com**. Resources include:

New supplements and adventures. ***GURPS*** continues to grow – see what's new at **gurps.sjgames.com**.

Warehouse 23. Our online store offers ***GURPS*** adventures, play aids, and support in PDF form . . . digital copies of our books, plus exclusive material available only on Warehouse 23! Just head over to **warehouse23.com**.

Pyramid (**pyramid.sjgames.com**). Our monthly PDF magazine includes new rules and articles for ***GURPS***, systemless locations, adventures, and much more. Look for each themed issue from Warehouse 23!

Internet. Visit us on the World Wide Web at **sjgames.com** for errata, updates, Q&A, and much more. To discuss ***GURPS*** with our staff and your fellow gamers, visit our forums at **forums.sjgames.com**. The ***How to Be a GURPS GM*** web page can be found at **gurps.sjgames.com/howtobeagurpsgm**.

Bibliographies. Many of our books have extensive bibliographies, and we're putting them online – with links to let you buy the resources that interest you! Go to each book's web page and look for the "Bibliography" link.

Errata. Everyone makes mistakes, including us – but we do our best to fix our errors. Up-to-date errata pages for all ***GURPS*** releases, including this book, are available on our website – see above.

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the ***GURPS Basic Set,*** *Fourth Edition.* Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

4. Example of Adventure Creation 32
Creating the Adventure 32
The Plot: Example 32
The NPCs: Example 32
Combat Balance 33
Fun Trumps Everything 33
Encounters and Scenes: Example 33
Possible Outcomes: Example 35

5. Running the Adventure 36
Important Resources for Running the Adventure . . 36
The ***Basic Set*** 36
Other Books 36
Other Resources 36
The Role of the GM 37
Before the Session 37
During the Session 37
After the Session 38
Running the Campaign 39

6. Combat 40
One of Many Tools 40
Customizing Combat 40
Lethality 40
Selecting Options 41
GURPS Martial Arts 41
Speeding Up Combat 43
Hex Maps and Counters 43
Practice as a Backup Plan 43
Influencing Combat 43
Useful Combat Attributes 43
Scaling for High-Powered Games 44
Useful Combat Skills 44
Comparison of Unarmed Combat Skills 45
Useful Combat Advantages 47
Big and Small Fighters 50
Telekinesis in Combat 51
Combat Disadvantages 52
Magic and Psionics 53
Improving Attacks 54
Fighting With Two Weapons 55
Overcoming Attacks 57
Improving Defenses 57
Overcoming Defenses 58

7. Example of Running the Adventure 62
Being the GM: Example 62
Before the Session: Example 62
During the Session: Example 62
After the Session: Example 66

Expanded Campaign Planning Form 67

Index 70
Character Trait Index 72

Introduction

GURPS is an incredibly robust roleplaying game (RPG), providing a consistent and flexible rules system for players and Game Masters (GMs) who want to enjoy all sorts of adventures, at all sorts of power levels, in all sorts of genres.

Because of this universality, it's much more of a "tool kit" than other systems limited to a narrow scope. When you tear into ***GURPS,*** you don't find a model car or plane inside. You find an unlimited building-block set, one you can use to build a car, plane, zeppelin, submarine, motorcycle, spaceship, stagecoach, or anything else you want! The ***GURPS*** GM is encouraged to envision the game he and his players want, and then use only those rules that support that vision, ignoring everything else.

You can't say it too often: ***GURPS*** is a tool kit. It's a system that requires tons of GM judgment to work. "As is," it offers dozens if not hundreds of advantages, disadvantages, skills, spells, perks, techniques, etc.; hundreds if not thousands of articles of gear; and many pages of optional rules. The vast majority of all this stuff isn't appropriate for all campaigns. Setting limits isn't about being a control freak or an authoritarian; it's about making the game playable, fun, and true to the campaign's desired genre and setting.

– Kromm

Who Is Kromm?

"Kromm" is Sean Punch, and he has been the ***GURPS*** Line Editor since 1995. During those years he has overseen the development of the ***GURPS*** line, including production of the ***Basic Set,*** *Fourth Edition* with David Pulver, and has engineered rules for nearly every ***GURPS*** product released in that time. He frequently answers rules questions on the Steve Jackson Games forums, and his quotes (set off from the rest of the text by lines above and below them) included in this supplement were culled from nearly 10,000 forum posts.

Rules for firearms and modern technology skills are simply not needed for a historically accurate adventure set in ancient Rome. Neither are rules for supernatural or cinematic abilities for a realistic game set in the present-day world. ***GURPS*** assumes that the GM will take only what he needs for the current campaign and leave the rest aside.

This is particularly true for combat. There are many combat options in the ***Basic Set,*** even more in ***GURPS Martial Arts*** (and other supplements), and it's crucial for the GM to have a clear understanding of those he wishes to use. Chapter 6 of this supplement presents guidelines for customizing the feel and flavor of combat.

To those new to ***GURPS,*** this wealth of options can give the false impression that the rules are more complex than other systems, harder to learn, or harder to play. ***How to Be a GURPS GM*** was written to put those mistaken impressions to rest.

GURPS has precisely *one* task-resolution mechanism: "Take a score, add a modifier, and roll three six-sided dice under the result." If you can "get" a game where some success rolls are d20 + modifiers/roll high, others are d%/roll low, and yet others are sum Nd<whatever>/see if you can get X . . . well, you can certainly "get" rolling 3d6 under a score, every time. Even if you drag in effect rolls (reactions, damage, Fright Checks, whatever), it's still only two sorts of rolls, and they all use the ordinary d6.

Its basic character-creation and game-play rules are just about trivial, with lots of modifiers for success rolls and lots of choices to spend points on. Almost everything is optional – and clearly marked as such – so the GM has lots of control, and there's never any requirement to go whole-hog and use the whole darn game.

This book is aimed squarely at the GM new to ***GURPS,*** whether new to the RPG hobby altogether or looking to switch from another system; however, familiarity with the basics of RPGs is assumed. It strives to be a bridge between reading the ***Basic Set*** and actually running that first session. Three chapters detail a low-tech fantasy game with 150-point player characters (PCs) as an ongoing example. The general principles evident in that walkthrough apply equally well to other sorts of games.

There is absolutely no One True Way, no "official" way, of running or playing ***GURPS!*** The whole purpose of the rules is for everyone, the GM and players alike, to have fun, no matter how they do it. ***How to Be a GURPS GM*** is *one* way, a useful guide to preparing and running games with the ***GURPS*** rules. The name of this book could have been "***One Way of Many to Be a GURPS GM, With a Particular Focus on Beginners,***" but the current title is already long enough.

My sincere hope is that this book removes some of the misperceptions of ***GURPS.*** It is a game of extraordinary flexibility, with mountains of ongoing support – and most of all, it is really fun!

About the Author

Warren "Mook" Wilson began playing roleplaying games in 1982. He ran his first game the following year and instantly fell in love with being the GM, especially after discovering ***GURPS*** in 1991. Over the decades, he has been blessed with fun, creative players who made running games a joy. Outside of gaming, he amuses himself in Los Angeles with reading and writing fiction, watching movies, and spending too much time on the computer. Online, he lives at **themook.net.** This is his first official ***GURPS*** product.

Chapter One
Preparing for Adventure

This is where it all begins: an eager GM who wants to learn the system and shape it to his group's needs; and enthusiastic players who want to work together to build the game of their dreams, and tailor a team of characters. Decisions must be made, choices set, and adventurers born!

Important Resources for Preparing the Adventure

The ***GURPS*** GM has a vast wealth of helpful resources at his disposal.

The *Basic Set*

Before any other considerations, the GM should have a good working knowledge of the ***GURPS Basic Set.*** Here's a quick summary of the chapters.

Characters

Introduction – An overview of the ***Basic Set*** and roleplaying in general, and a *Quick Start* section on pp. B8-9.

Chapter 1: Creating a Character – Everything needed to design a player character, including an explanation of what traits count as disadvantages (p. B11) and a helpful checklist of important sections (pp. B13-14).

Chapter 2: Advantages – Detailed explanations of advantages and perks, including types (mental, physical, social, exotic, supernatural, mundane), limitations and enhancements, and advice on designing new ones.

Chapter 3: Disadvantages – Detailed explanations of disadvantages and quirks, much like the chapter on advantages.

Chapter 4: Skills – Descriptions of skills, along with rules for modifiers, defaults, and techniques. Of particular note is *Meaning of Skill Levels* (pp. B171-172).

Chapter 5: Magic and *Chapter 6: Psionics* – If magic or psionics will exist in the campaign, these chapters are indispensable; otherwise, they can be put off for later.

Chapter 7: Templates – Guidelines for using premade character templates, which can be of enormous help to the new GM and players.

Chapter 8: Equipment – Tables of weapons, armor, shields, and other gear.

Chapter 9: Character Development – Ways for players to improve their characters once play has begun.

Trait Lists – Alphabetized lists of all advantages, disadvantages, modifiers, skills, techniques, and spells.

Iconic Characters – Examples of a variety of completed heroes, from the default Infinite Worlds setting.

Campaigns

Chapter 10: Success Rolls – Introduction to the primary game mechanic, the 3d6 roll (written as 3d), as applied in a multitude of situations.

Chapter 11: Combat and *Chapter 12: Tactical Combat* – The full spectrum of the ***GURPS*** combat rules, from most basic to most in-depth, including ranged, melee, and unarmed attacks. Covers movement, maneuvers, damage, weapons and armor, and much more. For groups that enjoy detailed combat, a solid understanding of these chapters is imperative.

Chapter 13: Special Combat Situations – Additional combat rules for special situations like vehicle and mounted combat, hit locations, fighting at different heights, explosions, etc.

It's hard to write rules that are equally good at all complexity levels. ***GURPS*** works best if you're using Chapters 11-13 of the ***Basic Set*** as well as most of ***Martial Arts.*** The hidden assumption is that the more of this you decide not to use, the less important "sensible" combat results are to you.

Chapter 14: Injuries, Illness, and Fatigue – The effects of all sorts of injury, as well as rules for recovery.

Chapter 15: Creating Templates – Further advice to the GM on using and creating templates to streamline character creation.

Chapter 16: Animals and Monsters – Rules and stats for common beasts. Usefulness depends on the campaign being run.

Chapter 17: Technology and Artifacts – Vehicles in combat, electronics, magic items, inventions and gadgeteering, etc. Again, very useful for some games; not needed for others.

Chapter 18: Game Mastering – GM advice for customizing the rules, choosing style and power level, using maps, and writing new adventures.

Chapter 19: Game Worlds – Broad advice for creating entire game worlds from scratch.

Chapter 20: Infinite Worlds – For those using the Infinite Worlds setting, or interested in their own cross-genre games, this chapter is a must-read; otherwise, it can wait.

Tables – Extremely useful tables of the most frequently needed information.

Campaign Planning Form – Completing this form, or the expanded one on pp. 67-69, can really help solidify the shape of a campaign.

GM Control Sheet, NPC Record Card, Time Use Sheet – Useful for organizing information once the game has begun.

*When you tear into **GURPS,** you don't find a model car or plane inside. You find an unlimited building-block set, one you can use to build a car, plane, zeppelin, submarine, motorcycle, spaceship, stagecoach, or anything else you want!*

Other *GURPS* Books

In addition to the ***Basic Set,*** many other excellent ***GURPS*** books are available. These add even more options for those who want them, provide worked examples of how the rules can be expanded and customized, and assist the GM and players in creating exactly the kind of game they're looking for. Note that, like the ***Basic Set*** itself, many supplements are tool kits. ***Fantasy*** includes the Roma Arcana setting as an example – but also provides the tools for making completely new fantasy settings.

Though a GM can certainly run any type of game using nothing more than the ***Basic Set,*** the *massive* amount of useful support materials can make campaign preparation much, much easier. The list on the following pages is a small sampling of the available supplements, divided by kind (although some products, such as the ***Spaceships*** series, cover multiple concepts). The list offers a good overview of what's out there for those unfamiliar with the system; new ***GURPS*** *Fourth Edition* products are released all the time. If you'd like to narrow your reading list to just supplements related to a specific genre, see *Which Books Should I Use?* (pp. 9-10).

Genre books cover such genres as conspiracy, cyberpunk, fantasy, and space SF. Their job is to describe the genre, its conventions, and its tropes; to survey genre fiction; and to explain in broad, non-world-specific terms how to create campaigns and PCs that are true-to-genre. *Examples:* ***Fantasy, Space.***

Worldbooks describe specific settings. Their job is to detail the history, geography, and politics of the setting; to catalog that setting's signature abilities, equipment, races, etc.; to show how to create suitable characters for that particular setting; and to illustrate possible campaign types in the setting. *Examples:* ***Banestorm, Infinite Worlds.***

Rulebooks provide new systems, usually either for character abilities (magic, martial arts, superhuman powers, and so on) or designing things (vehicles, weapons, etc.). Their job is to provide expansions of the core rules that can be used in any genre or game world (although they'll suit some genres and settings better than others!). *Examples:* ***Martial Arts, Powers****.*

Catalogs list ready-made armor, beasts, implants, magic items, races, vehicles, weapons, or whatever. Their job is to provide large numbers of sorted, indexed items with statistics that can be used in any genre or game world (although they'll suit some genres and settings better than others!). *Examples:* ***Ultra-Tech, High-Tech.***

Examples of Genre Books

Action: Series of genre books for running cinematic games like action movies, full of firefights, harrowing rescues, and car chases.

Dungeon Fantasy: Series of genre books for running "old school" dungeon crawls, where most adventures consist of killing monsters in ancient ruins filled with traps and looting their treasure.

Dungeon Fantasy isn't for everyone. It isn't a great buy for people who think fun is about detailed rules for armor weights, economics, physical fatigue, etc. It's an actively rotten buy for anybody who values realism or believability, since it encourages the players to create power-hungry psychos who have no social background, who take disads as a shameless point-grab, and who stack up bonuses to get godlike power at cut rates in terms of both dollars and points. I specifically wrote it for people who think fun is about having detailed rules if and only if cool, niche-specific abilities and/or raiding dungeons is involved.

In short, ***GURPS*** is about the believable, detailed stuff by default, and ***Dungeon Fantasy*** is intended as a specific antidote for that bias.

Fantasy: Genre book for creating all manner of original fantasy settings, with advice on magic, deities, monsters, societies, cultures, and more.

Horror: Genre book for running horror games of all kinds.

Monster Hunters: Series in which the characters are cinematic heroes protecting an unsuspecting world from various powerful and dangerous monsters.

Mysteries: Advice and guidelines for mystery adventures and PCs who are crime-solvers.

Psionic Campaigns: Genre book for incorporating psionic abilities into any campaign.

Space: Genre book of adventuring in space and on other planets, with detailed rules for creating aliens, civilizations, even entire worlds.

Supers: Genre book for superhero games, with guidelines for creating super-powered PCs and adventures.

Examples of Worldbooks

Banestorm: Complete, original worldbook detailing the fantasy setting of Yrth.

Crusades: Worldbook for games set during the Crusades.

Horror: The Madness Dossier: Worldbook in which the modern world is jeopardized by hidden inhuman forces bent on undoing history as we know it.

Hot Spots: Series of resources that each focus on a single, real-world adventuring locale.

Infinite Worlds: Worldbook of the default ***GURPS*** cross-genre setting, expanding on the information from Chapter 20 of the ***Basic Set.*** Additional releases deal with particular worlds and timelines.

Locations: Series that provides specific, fictional areas in which to adventure.

Reign of Steel: Will to Live: Worldbook describing a futuristic robot apocalypse. The original Third Edition worldbook is needed to make full use of the information.

Thaumatology: Age of Gold: A magical variant of the Golden Age of pulps comes alive in this worldbook that uses information presented in ***Thaumatology.***

Transhuman Space: Series of supplements detailing an original future setting, where strides in genetic engineering, technology, and space travel have completely transformed society.

Traveller: Interstellar Wars: Worldbook set in the universe of Marc Miller's *Traveller*, with rules for interstellar combat, commerce, exploration, ship design, and more.

Examples of Rulebooks

City Stats: Explains how to summarize cities with a set of unified stats according to their environment, population, health, wealth, etc.

Gun Fu: Describes rules for highly cinematic gunplay, with new styles, techniques, and perks for legendary gunfighters.

Magic: Rulebook for all things magical, expanding on the core system from the ***Basic Set,*** and detailing alternative systems. Other releases concentrate on specific aspects of magic.

Martial Arts: Extensive rulebook (with a series of spin-offs) for those who want even more depth to their combat, including new maneuvers, techniques, hit locations, and much more. Other releases concentrate on specific styles or martial artists, and may be more correctly classified as other kinds of products (for example, ***Martial Arts: Gladiators*** is as much a worldbook and catalog as rulebook for replicating the Roman-arena experience).

Martial Arts easily does for fightin' what ***Magic*** does for wizards or ***Powers*** does for those with superhuman abilities. It takes a chapter or so of basic rules and blows it out into 256 pages of detailed rules.

Mass Combat: Contains an abstract, fully generic system for playing out large-scale battles.

Power-Ups: Series detailing extra options for character creation.

Powers: Guidelines for designing and dealing with characters with superhuman powers, whether based on magic, psionics, super powers, chi, or anything else. Provides numerous worked examples of expanding the ***Basic Set*** advantages to cover a variety of abilities.

Powers: Divine Favor: Offers a complete system for deities to intervene on behalf of faithful characters, following the structure found in ***Powers.***

Psionic Powers: Provides premade psionic abilities, following the structure found in ***Powers.***

Social Engineering: Expands and builds upon the social interaction rules from the ***Basic Set.*** Includes a set of expanded reaction tables. Other releases explore specific social structures.

Spaceships: Series of rulebooks and catalogs providing a system for designing and using all kinds of spacecraft, as well as dozens of premade ships.

Tactical Shooting: Rulebook for realistic and detailed gunplay, with new styles, techniques, and perks for real-world gunfighters.

Template Toolkit 1: Characters: Adds detail to the template method of streamlining character creation offered in Chapters 7 and 15 of the ***Basic Set.***

Thaumatology: Offers advice for using magic in a game, including even more variant systems. Other releases explore specific aspects of magic or outline settings influenced by magic.

Examples of Catalogs

Bio-Tech: Covers current and future biotechnology, including cloning, genetic engineering, medical care, and drugs.

Creatures of the Night: Series detailing a variety of ready-to-use creatures and monsters.

Dungeon Fantasy Monsters: Series describing monsters and creatures for adventurers to battle.

Fantasy-Tech 1: The Edge of Reality: Presents "alternate history" weapons and gear that may have never existed – but should have.

High-Tech: Catalog of weapons, armor, vehicles, and miscellaneous gear from the 18th century to modern day. Other releases cover specific eras or types of gear in greater detail.

Loadouts: Series offering preselected weapon and gear lists for adventurers.

Low-Tech: Series detailing weapons, armor, vehicles, technology, and gear from the time periods and tech levels before those in ***High-Tech.***

Psi-Tech: Catalog of technology that interacts with psionic abilities – detecting, creating, amplifying, negating, etc.

Psis: Provides psionic character templates and ability packages.

Ultra-Tech: Catalog of futuristic weapons, protection, medical technology, and other gear from the near future to the limits of super-science

Where Are the Adventures?

A few ready-made ***GURPS*** adventures are available as standalone supplements (such as ***Big Lizzie, Lair of the Fat Man, Caravan to Ein Arris,*** or ***Dungeon Fantasy Adventure 1: Mirror of the Fire Demon***) or in many issues of *Pyramid* magazine, with more on the way. However, the open and flexible nature of the system makes it difficult to provide prewritten scenarios that will be widely useful. Even groups playing in the same genre can have game worlds based on assumptions that differ a great deal. It is simply more useful to provide ***GURPS*** GMs with the *tools* to create their own adventures than to account in a single adventure for all possible game varieties.

Other Books

There are two other books new GMs may find useful.

GURPS** for Dummies:* Filled with advice for newcomers to ***GURPS, both players and GMs. Of particular note during pregame preparation and character creation are *Part I: Getting Started With **GURPS,** Part II: Enhancing Your Character*, and *Part III: Playing With Your Character*.

Robin's Laws of Good Gamemastering: Though not specific to ***GURPS,*** this book from Steve Jackson Games packs in an enormous amount of excellent advice on being a GM. Covers types of players, pacing, plot, designing your own adventures and campaigns, and much more.

GURPS Character Assistant

The ***GURPS Character Assistant*** (GCA) computer program is an extremely convenient way to create and store characters. It contains *all* of the basic character-creation rules, automatically tracks points being spent, updates in real-time, saves to file, and prints out sheets for use at the table. More information about GCA can be found at **gurps.sjgames.com/characterassistant.**

Online

Finally, there are a number of online ***GURPS*** resources.

Steve Jackson Games Forum (**forums.sjgames.com**): Questions and discussions can be posted directly to the dedicated ***GURPS*** forum, and the community of users is very helpful.

Warehouse 23 (**warehouse23.com**): Steve Jackson Games' online store sells digital releases (such as PDFs and the Windows program ***GURPS Character Assistant***) – and also physical products, if you lack a local gaming store.

Pyramid Magazine (**pyramid.sjgames.com**): *Pyramid* is a monthly PDF magazine, with every issue packed with ***GURPS*** goodies. The Web page has samples and subscription information.

Other Online Resources (**gurps.sjgames.com/resources**): A central page of ***GURPS*** information, including links to errata, FAQ, and downloadable sheets (like the Character Sheet and Campaign Planning Form).

Laying the Foundation

Before the GM designs the first adventure, and before the players create their adventurers, many details must be decided. Being familiar with the ***Basic Set*** rules, and aware of all the support material available, makes those decisions much easier.

It's important that before anybody creates a character, you set campaign parameters: mana level, tech level, starting money, and so on. You should also sit down and create lists of allowed advantages, perks, disadvantages, skills, and techniques; set caps on attributes, secondary characteristics, advantage levels, skill levels, and technique levels; and specify whether you're permitting enhancements and limitations, and if so, which ones and in what forms. Finally, you have to do something similar for equipment.

Does the group want to play a historically accurate Western, with 100-point cowboys? Or a space-merchant story with 200-point ship captains? Or a wildly cinematic superhero tale with 1,000-point champions? These are all possible choices, as are hundreds more, so the first step is to narrow the focus down from "we can play anything we want" to "we want to play *this*."

This formalizing of the game limits doesn't have to be as concrete as preparing actual lists for the players. Some GMs find it easier to just say, "Nothing too exotic or supernatural," or "PC wizards are okay, but no Magery higher than 2." Alternatively, the GM can consider each ability on a case-by-case basis during character creation. Do whatever works for the group, as long as everyone agrees.

When a GM has ideas for more than one game to run, he might want to present them to the players along with descriptions of genre, power level, types of characters, likely adventures, etc. The whole group can then decide, or even vote, to determine which game sounds most fun.

Importance of Communication

It is possible to play RPGs in an adversarial way, with the players trying to "beat" the GM within the rules of the game. However, it's much more common for an RPG to be a cooperative endeavor of storytelling, with everyone working together to create and experience an entertaining adventure. While ***GURPS*** can handle the former, it generally assumes the latter.

With that in mind, it's important for all involved to "be on the same page." Since the bulk of preparation falls to the GM, he is often the one to suggest initial ideas. Then the group can adjust and modify, to make the game exactly what they want it to be, but this assumes a group willing and capable of communicating among themselves.

Try holding a "game session" where, instead of gaming, the players and GM sit down and talk out everyone's assumptions about deadliness, genre, heroicism, realism, etc.

The players' goal is to share enough information about their desired PCs and objectives that the player group can avoid excessive niche overlap or a fatal disparity in goals, and so that the GM can fine-tune his adventures to the PCs. The GM's goal is to share enough information about the campaign that the players know what abilities the PC party absolutely cannot afford to be without, and how much plot immunity they'll enjoy.

It's also important to be sure that *everyone* knows what they're getting into vis-a-vis the rules. In a combat-heavy campaign, it can be helpful to end this little chat session with a mock battle between carbon copies of the PCs and generic foes. This is a "dry run"; it isn't for real and doesn't count. The goal is to show up fatal weaknesses, like "Bob has crappy defenses," "Jaime doesn't realize that her archer can't hit anything in a real fight," or, "Lee's guy can't actually penetrate leather armor!"

This last bit is important. I can't count the number of times I've had newbies show up and seriously think that a ST 8 thief with knives would be useful in a fight, or that active defenses don't matter if you have lots of HP, or that you roll vs. Bow at no penalty to hit a target 50 yards away, or that bows and polearms are a good idea when most of the fights are close-quarters battle.

Don't Be Afraid to Say No

The GM's job is to create and bring to life a world that is fun to explore and adventure in. This requires a great deal of collaboration with the players, to include those things they most enjoy. It also requires the GM to occasionally say no, whether to particular character types, traits, or directions for the story to go in.

A GM who agrees to things he simply will not enjoy, or feels are too powerful or unbalancing for his skill, isn't helping the group's survival. He shouldn't let players force options into the campaign that don't mesh with the common vision of the game world. While striving to ensure that everyone's voice is heard, the GM can't forget his own!

The rest of this chapter helps the beginning GM make those choices that tailor the shape of the game. These decisions are the starting point from which the group begins.

Fun for Everyone

Some gamers have a long-held view of the GM as somehow apart from the rest of the players, as though his job is to create fun games for everyone else while sacrificing his own entertainment for the good of the group. While it's true that the GM chooses to take on the responsibility of running the game, along with the challenges that brings, the whole point of ***GURPS*** is for *everyone* to have fun! As GM, keep in mind that your enjoyment is just as important to group success as anyone's. This means designing games that you like running, and not feeling compelled to use rules, settings, or anything else you don't enjoy.

Players should remember that while it's important for them to have a voice in the direction of the game, the bottom line is that if *any* player is unhappy, GM included, the game suffers. Coercing the GM into allowing aspects with which he's not comfortable has a negative impact on the entire group.

Choosing a Genre

The most fundamental question about any new campaign is usually what genre it will be. That is, what kind of stories does the group want to tell? Tales of pulp action spies, four-color superheroes, medieval knights, brave space explorers, powerful wizards – these are all common tropes for RPGs. This choice affects what kinds of adventurers can be created, possible power levels, and even styles of play.

The beginning GM may want to limit his first game to something basic, and save the higher-powered abilities for later campaigns when he is more familiar with the system.

Being new to the game system really makes supernatural capabilities an iffy element to include in your campaign. I would recommend getting very, very familiar with things like character creation, skill use, combat, Influence rolls and reaction rolls, and the game's quirks and notation, before going within 50 paces of spells, psi, super-powers, etc. I'd recommend sticking to the real world, probably in the modern day.

Which Books Should I Use?

A common question is which additional books to use for specific genres. It's very possible to run all kinds of games with just the ***Basic Set,*** but other books can certainly make things easier!

A few products are extremely useful regardless of genre: ***Low-Tech, High-Tech,*** and ***Ultra-Tech,*** for detailed gear at various tech levels; ***Martial Arts,*** for expanded combat options; ***Mysteries,*** for crime-solving adventurers; and ***Powers,*** for high-powered characters of all kinds.

The "GU" in ***GURPS*** mean that it takes on most or all fictional genres and uses a single set of rules to address them. It's a common fiction that the label has something to do with supporting the styles and goals of all gaming groups, but that's never been a design goal for ***GURPS.*** For instance, with all its rules, ***GURPS*** clearly doesn't suit those who like diceless, rules-light play, and with its point-buy system, it clearly doesn't suit those who dislike doing math.

GURPS is generic and universal, which means that it's 80% or 90% as good as a specific rules set for a given genre or setting. But it's 80-90% as good for *all* genres and settings. Those who regularly play outside their pet environment, or mix things up, will find it a far better investment than a one-setting, one-genre game.

Honestly, we're simply not interested in being *the* historical simulation game, *the* vampire game, *the* transhuman game, *the* commando game, *the* hack-and-slash fantasy game, etc. We're interested in being the game for people who want to try all of those, and 100 more things, in the course of a few years or even the same campaign.

The following books are recommended for some of the more common genres.

Fantasy: ***Fantasy*** is essential for world-building. ***Low-Tech*** and, for certain alternate timelines, ***Fantasy-Tech 1: The Edge of Reality*** are great for arms and armor. ***Magic*** is necessary if the setting emphasizes magic; get ***Thaumatology*** for alternative styles of spellcasting. ***Powers: Divine Favor*** is helpful if deities assist their followers. ***Dungeon Fantasy*** is best for "hack and slash" loot-fests. Using the premade ***Banestorm*** setting – or adapting one of the medieval-themed ***Hot Spots*** or ***Locations*** supplements, such as ***Locations: Tower of Octavius*** – can save some time. The ***Creatures of the Night*** series and ***Dungeon Fantasy Monsters*** provide plenty of enemies to fight.

Horror: ***Horror*** is of great use, of course. For mowing down armies of zombies in modern-movie fashion, grab ***Action*** – and ***Zombies,*** obviously! For further firearms fun, get ***Gun Fu.*** Games with the PCs protecting the present-day world from things out to destroy humanity may want ***Monster Hunters*** or ***Horror: The Madness Dossier.*** More subtle horror games, with adventurers investigating ancient prophecies, may want ***Mysteries. Magic*** (and possibly ***Thaumatology***) is helpful if magic is important to the setting. ***Psis, Psionic Campaigns,*** and ***Psionic Powers*** cover psionics. The ***Creatures of the Night*** series, ***Dungeon Fantasy Monsters,*** or ***Monster Hunters 3: The Enemy*** can provide monsters to fight. ***Loadouts: Monster Hunters*** and the appropriate tech catalog help PCs gear up.

Military: ***Martial Arts*** is certainly a must-have, with ***Tactical Shooting*** for modern realistic games, and ***Action*** for cinematic games (with ***Gun Fu*** expanding the options). ***SEALs in Vietnam*** has some general information on military characters that's also good for other settings. ***Mass Combat*** can help with conflicts that are larger than typical PC skirmishes. ***Low-Tech, High-Tech,*** or ***Ultra-Tech*** (depending on the tech level) are vital for weapons, armor, and equipment.

Modern Action: This genre is perhaps the simplest game to run with just the ***Basic Set,*** and ***High-Tech*** for gear. If cinematic, the ***Action*** series (expanded by ***Gun Fu***) was specifically written for this kind of game; if not, ***Tactical Shooting. Martial Arts*** offers additional rules for combat.

Science Fiction: ***Bio-Tech, Space, Spaceships,*** and ***Ultra-Tech*** are all useful. Some games include mental abilities, for which ***Psis, Psionic Campaigns,*** and ***Psionic Powers*** help. Established settings include ***Tales of the Solar Patrol, Transhuman Space,*** and ***Traveller: Interstellar Wars.***

Superhero: For the mechanics of superhero characters and abilities, ***Powers*** is the definite choice. ***Supers*** is a genre book for making a game "feel" like a four-color comic book. Many other books could be useful, depending on the kinds of heroes created: ***Magic*** and ***Thaumatology*** for magic; ***Psis, Psionic Campaigns,*** and ***Psionic Powers*** for psionics; ***Martial Arts*** for warriors; and ***Low-Tech, High-Tech,*** or ***Ultra-Tech*** for equipment. For a premade Golden Age of pulp setting, review ***Thaumatology: Age of Gold.***

Time Travel and Cross-Genre: ***Infinite Worlds*** is the go-to book here, covering the whole range of options for using multiple timelines and genres in a single campaign. Other releases in this series expand the alternate realities covered by the main worldbook. Recommended books for individual genres still apply.

Western: Historically accurate Old West games benefit from ***High-Tech*** for equipment and ***Martial Arts*** for fighting styles. ***Gun Fu*** and ***Tactical Shooting*** offer even more firearms options. Though the ***Action*** series was written for modern adventures, much of the style and GM advice apply. "Weird West" settings could start with the adventure ***Big Lizzie,*** and might call for ***Magic*** and ***Thaumatology,*** or the ***Creatures of the Night*** series for monsters.

Choosing a Style

If the genre is what kind of stories to tell, then the style is how to tell them. Will the game focus on realistic folks, ever-mindful of the frequent perils of the adventuring life? Or will the PCs be larger-than-life heroes, able to accomplish feats that are unrealistic but tell a great tale? Will the game keep a sober tone, or play mostly for laughs? Will the GM use only rules from the ***Basic Set,*** include options from other books, or make up house rules of his own?

All of these, and more, are perfectly valid ways to play, and ***GURPS*** handles them smoothly. As with the variety of movie types, the same basic plot can be used for action, comedy, romance, drama, or suspense, depending on how the story is told. But it's important for everyone in the group to have the same expectations, or else the player looking for a few laughs, the player expecting a gritty game of life-and-death combat, and the GM expecting an epic tale of legendary heroes will all be disappointed.

Realistic or Cinematic

This is the most obvious dividing line of style. Realistic games keep the story somewhat grounded – combat is deadly, and a single unlucky injury can put a hero down. Even in settings with strange, supernatural abilities, the rest of the world works as we know it: People get fatigued without food and rest, bad weather slows travel, and vehicles and equipment break down without maintenance.

I use all the rules for accumulated wounds, bleeding, crippling, extreme dismemberment, fatigue, hit-location effects, knockdown, shock, and stunning. I also check for disease in plague-ridden areas, and penalize PCs who miss water, sleep, or food. This results in a very gritty feel! And I don't even use the rules for infection, partial injuries, severe bleeding, or horrible wounds to the neck/skull/veins/vitals, nor do I require Fright Checks for anything less than supernatural fear. "Turning on" those rules would make things even grittier.

Cinematic Rules

The default tendency of ***GURPS*** is to lean toward realism – but the cinematic style is far from ignored! In addition to the excellent advice in *The Cinematic Campaign,* pp. B488-489, and *Cinematic Combat Rules,* p. B417, here are just a few of the most common cinematic rules.

Advantages: Daredevil (p. B47), Enhanced Defenses (p. B51), Extra Attack (p. B53), Gadgeteer (pp. B56-57, B475-477), Gizmos (p. B57), Gunslinger (p. B58), Luck (p. B66), Rapier Wit (p. B79), Serendipity (p. B83), Social Chameleon (p. B86), Trained by a Master (p. B93), Unusual Background (p. B96), Weapon Master (p. B99), Wild Talent (p. B99).

Skills: Blind Fighting (p. B180), Computer Hacking (p. B184), Flying Leap (p. B196), Mental Strength (p. B209), Power Blow (p. B215), Pressure Points (p. B215), Pressure Secrets (p. B215), Throwing Art (p. B226).

Techniques: Dual-Weapon Attack (pp. B230, B417), Whirlwind Attack (p. B232).

Time Spent: Instant task completion, at -10 to skill (p. B346).

As well, the ***Action*** series and ***Gun Fu*** are *devoted* to cinematic gaming. ***Martial Arts*** provides a lot of options, including cinematic skills (pp. 54-62), techniques (pp. 82-89), combat (pp. 125-133), and injury (p. 139). And ***Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys*** lets players shape the story by spending points.

Cinematic games relegate those details to the background. Combat can still be deadly, but only if it's dramatically appropriate. Heroes wade through armies of nameless goons with little fear of death to reach their true enemy, and logistical complications like food and gear are assumed to take care of themselves, unless they somehow make the story more interesting.

This applies to social and mental feats as well as physical ones. Sufficiently high modifiers eventually tip the scale from realism to cinematic, even if those modifiers are achieved through a multitude of otherwise realistic advantages and skills. Someone with a +5 reaction bonus, from three or four social traits, is realistic; one with a +15 reaction bonus, from seven or eight social traits, is cinematic.

Cinematic depends just as much on subtracting rules as it does on adding. Detailed rules like those for bleeding (p. B420) or familiarity (p. B169) are best ignored when going for a cinematic feel.

Rules-Light or Rules-Heavy

Another important thing to consider is the role of the rules themselves.

Everything in ***GURPS*** is optional – we say so all over the place. We specifically say things like "as long as the GM is fair and consistent, he can change any number, any cost, any rule," "everyone must realize that an epic story is apt to transcend the rules," "don't let adherence to a formula spoil the game," and "if there is only one 'right' answer to fit the plot of the adventure – then that's the answer." The rules are only there for when you need them to help advance the game. Most of the time, you should be doing that by talking and roleplaying and telling a story.

Resource-management and roll-based play is a valid style of gaming, notably for hard-nosed military adventure, dedicated puzzle-solving campaigns, and of course dungeon crawls. But those are only some kinds of gaming, and ***GURPS*** aims to support all kinds. Nowhere does it say "if you prefer to make stuff up and not roll dice, this is the wrong game for you."

The ***GURPS*** system is, at its core, incredibly streamlined, in most cases boiling down to "roll 3d against this target number" (standard six-sided dice are the only kind used with ***GURPS,*** so a call for a roll of "3d" or "1d" always means "3d6" or "1d6"). Those who prefer a minimum of rules can use the basic system to great effect without adding in any of the numerous options.

For those who prefer rules-heavy games, ***GURPS*** has an incredible buffet of optional and expanded rules that add depth and complexity to the game, at the cost of more aspects to keep track of. Consider the rules for hit location. ***GURPS*** assumes that most groups use the hit location rules found on pp. B398-400, which include penalties and special effects for attacking the torso, vitals, skull, eye, face, neck, groin, arm/leg, hand/foot, and weapon.

Some GMs may simplify this down to just locations for skull, torso, arm/leg, and weapon. Some may not use any rules for hit location at all, and assume all attacks are directed at the torso. Still others may decide the hit locations in the ***Basic Set*** aren't comprehensive *enough,* and include all the additional locations from ***Martial Arts,*** p. 137 (ear, jaw, joints, nose, spine, and veins and arteries).

This is just one example of many. The ***GURPS*** GM is expected to adjust the rules in any way he can to get the most fun out of the game.

House Rules

Many GMs enjoy tweaking the rules, and using their own variations and "house rules." This is fine, as long as the players are aware of these changes and agree to them. It's important to carefully consider the impact of any changes, though – ***GURPS*** has been playtested for countless hours over the years, and is designed to work smoothly around specific assumptions. Making changes to one or two of the fundamental pieces may have unforeseen consequences.

Character Death

How much of a threat character death poses is of great interest to most players. In some groups, the GM is expected to tweak things on the fly to ensure PCs have every chance of living, and to adjust which rules are used to lean toward PC survival. Others prefer to include numerous lethal combat options, and just let the dice land where they may – if a hero dies, so be it.

Matching expectations about this *before* the campaign begins is very important, to avoid misunderstanding and disappointment.

Choosing a Power Level

After genre and style, it's time to determine the power level of the PCs, as measured by their character points.

The ***GURPS*** point system isn't intended to balance combat effectiveness. Its goal is to balance ability across all possible adventuring activities: combat, crafting, healing and support, information gathering, outdoorsmanship, social interaction, stealth, travel, etc. It isn't an objective system for rating capability in a mainly combat environment. It's a *highly subjective* system for use by GMs to rate PCs against the challenges of an entire campaign – including social challenges, obstacles to travel, economic puzzles, intellectual riddles, and many other things that have no connection to fighting.

The guidelines on p. B487 are valuable here, detailing the spectrum of possible power levels from Feeble (less than 25 points) to Godlike (more than 1,000 points). The Heroic range of 100 to 200 points is common for the beginning GM. It gives players a decent amount of points with which to build competent and varied heroes, while still allowing the GM to keep the game at a manageable power level.

Limiting Point Spending

Even a small amount of initial points can create a protagonist difficult to GM if the majority of those points are all spent in a single area. A number of methods can mitigate this effect (by enforcing point and attribute caps, requiring specific expenditures, etc.), outlined on pp. B487-488. The GM should use these methods to ensure the starting adventurers are ones he is comfortable having in his game.

"High-powered vs. low-powered," "believable people vs. unrealistic ones with powers," and "realistic campaign vs. cinematic one" are three separate axes. The first describes how many points people have, the second describes what they're allowed to buy with their points, and the third describes how the universe and plot treat those people.

Character Traits

As already mentioned, the universal nature of ***GURPS*** demands that the GM make deliberate decisions about what, and what not, to include in the game, starting with character traits. If the GM agrees to a character with an ability not already covered by existing traits, the sections on *New Advantages* (p. B117), *New Disadvantages* (p. B165), *Creating Techniques* (p. B229), *Alternative Magic Systems* (p. B242), and *Other Powers* (p. B257) will be helpful. Outside of the ***Basic Set,*** even more options are presented in books like ***Magic, Powers, Supers,*** and ***Thaumatology.***

Attributes

Establish the range of acceptable attributes first, such as "DX, IQ, and HT can fall between 9 and 14, inclusive; ST can go as high as 18." See p. B14 for guidelines on what the levels actually mean, as well as the following advice from Kromm.

6 or less: Crippling (literally – you can't live a normal life).

7: Poor (you can life a normal life, with care, but never be an adventurer).

8-9: Below-Average (low side of able-bodied, probably the lowest an adventurer should ever have).

10: Average (most scores for most people).

11-12: Above-Average (high side of able-bodied, probably a good average for adventurers).

13-14: Exceptional (highest you'll likely meet on the street, above-average for adventurers).

15-16: Amazing (highest you'll likely see or hear about, strongly *defines* an adventurer).

17-18: Legendary (historical "bests" and remarkable fictional heroes).

19-20: Mythic (astounding even among great heroes in fiction and folklore).

21 or more: Superhuman (off-limits to humans, barely suitable for great heroes, okay for deities).

Skills, Advantages, and Disadvantages

Next, go through the master *Trait Lists* on pp. B297-306. Note traits that are poor fits, such as "because our campaign is set during the Renaissance, no computer skills are available," or "only spells from the Water college can be learned by beginning PCs."

Steve Jackson Games provides an excellent online tool for creating custom lists of sorted traits at **sjgames.com/gameaids/gurps/sorter.** The GM can designate each skill, advantage, and disadvantage from the ***Basic Set*** as being "Required," "Recommended," "Allowed," "Not Recommended," or "Forbidden." Once the list is complete, the GM prints it out as a guide for players.

After determining these lists, decide if there are any limits on skill level. See p. B172 for guidelines as to what skill levels represent, as well as the following suggestions from Kromm.

Average People (8-13)

8-9: Skills remembered from school days.

10-11: Most skills, including hobbies, secondary job skills of volunteers, and primary skills of draftees.

12-13: Primary job skills of most normal people (*including* cops, doctors, pilots, and soldiers).

Experts (14-19)

14-15: Someone good enough to work under life-or-death conditions (including commandos, field surgeons, and ace pilots).

16-17: Someone good enough to stand out in his field, however rarefied (*top* commando, ace of *aces,* etc.).

18-19: Best of a generation (e.g., the *world's* best sniper).

Masters (20-25)

20-21: Top master alive (presumably good enough to teach the best of a couple of generations).

22-23: Confirmed top master of all time.

24-25: Mythic masters, verging on the cinematic.

Competing Disadvantages

Occasionally, adventurers will have two disadvantages that both come into play at the same time. Below is a suggested method for handling these times.

Roll both self-control rolls. The one that fails by more wins. For traits that have no self-control number, use Will. For instance, if it's Honesty (9) vs. Alcoholism to avoid stealing that bottle of booze, and the hero has Will 11, roll 9 vs. 11 and compare margins of failure. If the dice come up 14 for Honesty (failure by 5) and 10 for Alcoholism (success by 1), Honesty wins by 6 and prevails; if the dice come up 10 (failure by 1) and 14 (failure by 3), Alcoholism wins by 2 and dominates the PC's thinking.

Whichever problem wins, remember to apply not *just* the bad effects of giving in to the disadvantage that "wins," but *also* the bad effects for not giving in to the other one. In the above example, if Alcoholism wins, then the PC gets hammered *and* must make a second, uncontested roll for Honesty – now at a penalty for being tipsy or drunk (p. B428) – not to turn himself in. If Honesty wins, he must suffer the bad effects of going without booze (use the Addiction rules).

In a tie, declare that the guy stands there vacillating and conflicted. The main effect is that time is wasted – the minimum time for the task at hand, but at least a turn in combat or a minute out of combat. Roll again when that time is up. Keep rolling until he gives in to something or the stimulus is removed.

Wealth and Status

The rules for these traits are on pp. B516-517, but Kromm has provided some useful clarifications.

In ***GURPS***, Status = *social* standing and Wealth = *economic* standing, and your complete socioeconomic profile – what we would call "social class" in the real world – comes from the two taken together. Since you can't retain Status that you can't pay for, low Wealth tends to drag you down. Someone with low Wealth has few everyday possessions, which is where 80% of his starting money goes (p. B26), and cannot afford a high cost of living and all that comes with it (pp. B265-266). "All that comes with it" is what the reserved 80% buys, incidentally.

These considerations are meant to have social implications in the game world: A TL8 person who chooses to be Poor [-15] starts with $4,000 and not $20,000, and has $3,200 and not $16,000 in assets, which are kept up with a cost of living consistent with that for Status -2 (p. B517), meaning "a room in a flophouse or shelter . . . or a patch of sidewalk" (p. B266). In short, he's a homeless itinerant or a drifter, and here's the important part: *By getting 15 points for Poor, he's accepting and locking in his legal status as "homeless itinerant."* It isn't just money that's affected, but others' perceptions of him. If a cop catches him flashing gift goods from rich party members, sees him entering a residence provided by said allies, etc., *the cop will intervene*. Such incidents should provide approximately -15 points of inconvenience.

There's also the bit about how much gear you start with, but that's actually a secondary effect of Wealth. The primary effects concern your credit rating, social network, relationship with bankers and taxmen, and so on, and the follow-on effects on your social freedoms and mobility. Wealth represents these things first of all. If the GM has no intention of enforcing the ramifications, then low Wealth isn't a valid disadvantage, any more than low Appearance would be valid in a campaign where all the PCs teleoperate giant battlemechs via FTL radio and never appear in the flesh.

Letting rich PCs bankroll poorer ones has little long-term impact on the campaign. It won't help the poorer PCs score better jobs in their downtime, get them into the right social situations for social engineering, or grant them free Status. It won't insulate poorer PCs with Greed from their demons. And it won't let poorer PCs justify any better return on Independent Income. It just means better gear – and gear that doesn't cost points has *no plot immunity at all*. No points means no obligation on the GM's part not to break, confiscate, or steal the gear – or not to have it prove cursed, faulty, radioactive, stolen, etc.

Wealth in actual play breaks down like this in my campaigns:

- Players whose PCs have Wealth are welcome to buy gear for less-fortunate PCs.
- Heroes with Wealth below that associated with the minimum Status level for plot-relevant social events don't receive invitations and get turned away at the door if they show up anyway, unless they can make some tough skill rolls.
- Heroes receive rewards and honors commensurate with their Wealth. The wealthy hero gets gifts befitting a millionaire. The poor one gets a free lunch.

Players who dislike this can do three things:

- Buy enough Status that they can't be ignored. While cheaper than Wealth, level for level, it's a bad investment long-term if you lack the Wealth to go with, as you'll eventually miss cost-of-living payments and lose Status.
- Save up money and points, and when they have enough of both, convince me that they've bought their way into the wealthy elite and spend points for Wealth and/or Status.
- Take high levels of Acting, Fast-Talk, Savoir-Faire (High Society), etc., and fake it. Always fun – but a failed skill roll can render the approach more-or-less a nonstarter thereafter, without a significant change in venue.

It goes without saying, I think, that this assumes the campaign has a significant social element – at least as important as, say, fighting or investigation. If it doesn't, then I'd recommend against using Status and Wealth at all, for any PC.

For a list of skills commonly relied on in action fiction, see pp. 21-22. A helpful guide specifically for gun skills can be found in ***Tactical Shooting*** (p. 42). For a completely different approach to skill use, see *Optional Rule: Wildcard Skills* (p. B175).

Routine Bonuses to Skill Use

When considering skill-level limits, be aware that someone's skill level measures his odds of success "under adventuring conditions," as noted on p. B171. Routine skill use, outside the pressures of adventuring, will always enjoy a +4 or more, in addition to possible bonuses for equipment (p. B345) and taking extra time (p. B346).

The rules were written under the assumption that most PCs would be getting +1 or +2 because the players would be sure to have decent equipment for their characters' most important skills, and generally +1 to +5 more for taking extra time in any situation where the GM wasn't saying, "Hurry! The guards are coming!"

Social Traits

Social traits also need to be addressed, things such as Cultural Familiarity, Language, Wealth, Reputation, Status, Rank, and identities (pp. B23-31). Some campaigns – like those filled with royal court intrigue or wide-ranging travel in distant lands – will focus on these heavily, while others ignore them altogether. The players need to know before creating their adventurers whether investing points in these areas is worthwhile.

This includes "Associated NPCs" advantages and disadvantages as well: Allies (p. B36), Contact Group (p. B44), Contacts (pp. B44-45), Dependents (p. B131), Enemies (p. B135), and Patrons (p. B72). Some GMs are happy with creating and running these kinds of NPCs; others prefer not to.

Any advantage that allows access to unusual or powerful benefits can be difficult to GM. For example, someone with enough money or connections to field a personal squad of 10 battle-hardened mercenaries requires special attention, not just for combat challenges, but also for making sure the *other* players don't feel overshadowed.

Equipment

Equipment, especially weapons and armor, is crucial to any ***GURPS*** adventurer. Those with superior equipment have a huge edge over others, so the GM needs to be clear about what kinds of gear are available. A warrior wearing plate armor and wielding a fine quality bastard sword has an unmistakable advantage over enemies with leather tunics and clubs, as does a gunman with an assault rifle over one with a pistol, and none of those things cost character points.

The outcome of a battle turns more upon equipment (which is priced realistically as opposed to for game balance, and in cash, not character points) and tactical conditions than on the nature of the fighters themselves. One 25-point archer with nothing but Night Vision and Bow skill, armed with a fine bow and fine arrows, and hiding in a tree at night, is very likely to slaughter a half-dozen Conan-esque guys who are worth 250 points but have only melee weapons and bare, buff chests.

Gadgeteering, Magic, and Powers

Gadgeteering (pp. B56-57, B475-477), Magic (pp. B234-253), and most of the abilities found in ***GURPS Powers*** are very open-ended types of character abilities that can really challenge a new GM. Their effects aren't limited to combat – they often allow those with points in them to discover plot clues and find information much more easily than those without. A new GM should be careful about allowing such capabilities into the game until he has some experience running ***GURPS.***

Nonhuman Races

In many genres, particularly fantasy and science fiction, players can create adventurers who aren't human, such as elves, giants, Venusians, etc. A first-time GM may want to stick with humans only, but if nonhuman races are allowed, the GM should create racial templates for them (pp. B450-454). This not only makes it simpler for the player, but also allows the GM to retain control over just what abilities the race does, and does not, have.

CHARACTER POINTS IN PLAY

Besides being the initial point budget for PC creation, character points are gained as the game progresses, and can be used either to further improve an adventurer, or to produce in-game effects. Be sure that all players understand how points will be used once the campaign begins.

Earned character points in ***GURPS*** aren't in any sense "experience points" (xp) awarded to the *character* for feats and deeds, but are "bonus points" given by the GM to the *player* as a reward for attendance and good roleplaying, and in theory redeemable for anything the GM chooses to offer. This includes temporary and permanent benefits for the PC – which should logically be both in-game and meta-game, since the points themselves are awarded for meta-game concerns.

Once the game is afoot, my only agenda is "make this a fun session for the players."
– Kromm

How Points Are Earned

Players earn character points by playing their PCs well, as explained on pp. B498-499. The PC is defined and established during character creation. How well the player then fills that role during the session determines the points he receives.

The GM may, of course, decide on additional ways for players to earn points, such as "anyone who helps Prince Felton retrieve the letter automatically receives 1 character point."

How Points Are Awarded

Generally, individual points are awarded to each player at the end of a session, based on the GM's judgment of how well he played. While anywhere from 0 to 5 points per session is recommended, this often means individual players don't receive the same number of points. For example, three players might be awarded three points, while one is given four because of a particularly well-played scene involving a Dependent, and another is given only two because he rushed into a burning building without even considering his hero's fear of fire.

The GM may prefer to give each player the same amount of points, based on the group's overall performance. While this does simplify the awarding process, and can foster a sense of team unity, it can also remove some of the incentive for individuals to play well, or be seen as unfair. As with most things, discuss this with the players before the campaign begins.

How Points Are Spent

In addition to the methods outlined in *Character Development* (pp. B290-296) for spending points to improve heroes (by increasing skills, gaining advantages, losing disadvantages, etc.), points can also optionally be used with *Influencing Success Rolls* (p. B347), or even to reduce damage taken (see *Flesh Wounds*, under *Cinematic Combat Rules*, p. B417). Likewise, ***Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys*** is a treasure trove of interesting uses for character points!

Die Rolls in Play

There are a few other types of rolls to look at while laying the groundwork for the game. Knowing how the GM plans to use these rolls, if at all, helps players decide where to spend their points for best effect.

Reaction Rolls and Influence Rolls

When the party of PCs encounters an NPC, the rules on pp. B494-495 and the *Reaction Table* on p. B560 can determine how he will react. Some GMs use this table constantly, letting the dice randomly dictate how NPCs react. Others never use it at all, preferring to run their NPCs as they feel they would react. Many use a little of both, deciding on reactions as the story requires most of the time, and reserving die rolls for the occasional background NPC.

Along with reaction rolls, the rules for *Influence Rolls* on p. B359 outline how certain skills can influence NPC reactions:

- Diplomacy (p. B187), for calm appeals to reason and compromise.
- Fast-Talk (p. B195), for convincing others to quickly decide in your favor.
- Intimidation (p. B202), for bullying and threatening.
- Savoir-Faire (p. B218), for exploiting a particular subculture's code of conduct.
- Sex Appeal (p. B219), for seduction.
- Streetwise (p. B223), for dealing with criminals and other rough crowds.

The GM may allow other skills in certain circumstances.

Fright Checks

The rules for Fright Checks – special Will rolls made to avoid the effects of fear – are on p. B360 (note *Fright Check Modifiers* and *The Rule of 14* especially). In a campaign where the PCs are ordinary folks caught up in dangerous firefights or supernatural enemies, Fright Checks may be common. If they are combat veterans or experienced paranormal investigators, Fright Checks likely will be rare, even nonexistent.

Using the Campaign Planning Form

Once the details of an upcoming campaign have been worked out, record them on a Campaign Planning Form, found on p. B567. This organizes all of the pertinent game information in one place, giving the GM and players a concrete snapshot of the campaign assumptions and limits. (A modified and expanded form can be found on pp. 67-69.)

Character Creation

Character creation is of critical importance in ***GURPS.*** It allows the GM and the players to establish a solid foundation by creating PCs that complement one another, are well-equipped to deal with the upcoming challenges, and adhere to the group's vision of the game world.

Many people seem to assume that players making their own characters, independently of the GM, is the norm in ***GURPS,*** when players creating characters with guidance and input from the GM is what the designers assume for experienced players, and having the GM create the character based on player description is what the designers recommend for newbies. ***GURPS*** definitely works best with *very* strong GM involvement. I openly admit that it falls down for play styles where you tell people "make characters and be here at 11:00," for player vs. player, and for any other variation that goes "Players Create Characters → Game Begins" instead of "GM Sets Limits → Players Create Characters → GM Vets Characters → Game Begins."

Creating a ***GURPS*** character can be intimidating for those new to the game because of the huge variety of options available, but the process definitely streamlines and speeds up with experience. The GM's job is to narrow the options down to a manageable size, and to assist the players in translating the adventurers they see in their mind to ones well-represented on the page.

Character Concepts

Before the players spend a single point, present an overview of the world the tales will unfold in, the kinds of people who inhabit it, and the kinds of stories you'd like to tell. This allows the players to create adventurers capable of handling the challenges and encounters coming their way. If the GM plans to tell tales of exploration and discovery, protagonists with nothing but combat skills are not a great fit.

I don't think that you can ever present *too much* detail on character creation. If some GMs spent even half the effort on this that they spend on world-building, they would end up with a campaign that remains stable for long enough for world-building to matter. Many GMs blow all their brainpower on maps, NPCs, setting description, etc., but punt on PC-design guidelines, with the result that they get totally inappropriate PCs who trash their wonderful idea for a world in about 15 minutes.

Adventurers shouldn't be designed in a vacuum, but should be the result of the entire group working together to create a party that shares some common goals. A certain amount of skill redundancy and overlap is helpful, but it's also important that each PC has a niche to call his own. Groups of all healers or all fighters will struggle with more than a few types of encounters. A group with a healer, melee warrior, ranged warrior, knowledgeable researcher, and smooth talker with numerous contacts has many more options for plots.

The Party as a Team

For one-on-one games (one GM and a single player), group dynamics and "spotlight time" are irrelevant. Most RPGs are group activities, though, so give some thought to how that group will mesh.

It might not be realistic, but "adventuring party = trained unit" is the most practical assumption when playing, running, or writing for an RPG. I strongly believe that this is *necessarily* the unstated, default premise of any roleplaying campaign, and that players who do not assume this – with a room full of other players sitting right there – are at a disadvantage. Roleplaying games are so obviously a cooperative group activity that reminding the players of this often makes me feel as if I'm insulting their intelligence. I do it anyhow, but I can't help but wish that players who don't assume "teamwork" when joining a group of four, six, or more other players would just go play a computer RPG.

I find it disturbing when I meet gamers who assume "solitary loner, unless the GM demands team" when it's clear from the way games are written and the way the vast majority of gaming groups meet and interact that "team, unless the GM allows loner" is the unspoken Golden Rule of the entire hobby. You *can* have adventures where this isn't true, but they're extra work to run and make fun. Time-pressed gamers frequently have no desire to do the extra work.

Social games are a noteworthy exception, but those aren't adventure games.

Assuming the PCs are all members of the same group – such as a military squad, government agency, or hirelings of the same merchant house – is the simplest way to accomplish this. Any background that the group agrees to, and provides a rationale for why their adventurers are working together, will suffice.

Using Templates

The specifics of using and creating character templates are outlined in the ***Basic Set*** (pp. B258-263, B445-454) and developed in ***Template Toolkit 1: Characters.*** Ready-to-use templates offer concrete examples of what various types of people look like in the setting – what kinds of traits they should have, what skill levels, what types of gear – all with point costs already correctly figured. This means players (especially new ones) don't have to worry about missing a crucial ability, like a legendary elven archer without the Fast-Draw skill, or a spy who doesn't know how to follow someone without being seen. They also aren't overwhelmed by the full range of possible options, and can instead focus on a narrower set of abilities.

Templates let the GM do much of the work on the players' behalf. Players might be given, for example, 250 points to build with, and presented with a variety of eight different 200-point templates to choose from. The player who chooses to build his own must consider the entire breadth of the ***GURPS*** rules, and spend each of his 250 points to arrive at the hero he wants. Meanwhile, the player who decides to use a template only has to decide which of the eight to pick from, and how to spend the last 50 points to customize it.

Thus, using templates can really save time during character creation, and ease players into the game quickly, even though templates require more work from the GM.

Who Spends the Points?

Once the players have established a rough idea of who their heroes will be, the GM guides them through the actual mechanics of putting it down on paper. There are a number of ways to do this.

Workable approaches are:

- Narrative creation. Each player describes his PC in plain language. You set his design to stats by creating the PC for him. You can even waive a point budget if you do this, because all that matters is that the PC fits the description, and not all descriptions are precisely N points.
- Collaborative creation. Each player sits down with you face-to-face (or in an Internet chat) with the rulebooks open, and the two of you collaboratively create her PC in real time, negotiating areas where you think there may be trouble.
- Vetted creation. Each player creates his PC in private and submits it to you before the game, with the understanding that it's a first draft only, and that you'll be returning an edited version that you'll accept in your game.
- Template creation. Each player creates her PC in private, but from templates designed by you, not from the wider rules set.

You can mix and match somewhat, too.

I'll add what I've said many times before here: I design and maintain the rules under the assumption that all GMs do one of the above.

For a group's first game, with players not familiar with ***GURPS,*** narrative creation is great – and GM-created templates can be immensely helpful, too (see *Using Templates,* above). The GM is assumed to have already read the rules, and put some effort into learning the system, so he can listen to each player's description of his adventurer and "translate" it into ***GURPS.*** The other methods rely on the players being more knowledgeable of the rules, and able to make informed decisions about how to best spend their character creation points.

If everyone is willing to compromise and communicate, it's uncommon for a GM to outright veto a PC. Points can often just be moved around a bit, or potentially abusive abilities replaced with more manageable ones.

Final Review

The last step is to give the created adventurers one final, thorough look. Point totals should fall within the agreed-upon starting range, and all math should be accurate. Attributes, skills, advantages, wealth, status, equipment, etc. should all fit the setting and any limits that have been agreed on.

Once everyone is happy with the finished party, the GM can start work on the first adventure (with the help of Chapter 3). For an example of setting- and character-preparation, see Chapter 2.

Chapter Two

Example of Adventure Preparation

Four friends have decided to get together for their first ***GURPS*** game. This chapter looks at how their group uses the information from Chapter 1 to put together the campaign details, and how they create a party that is up to the trials ahead. The steps these players go through provide an example of one solid way to get started with ***GURPS.***

The group consists of:

Marcus: Has been a Game Master for roleplaying games of all types for many years, and recently decided to try ***GURPS*** after purchasing the ***Basic Set.***

Anne: Has also been playing roleplaying games for many years, including ***GURPS*** a few times.

Peter: This is only his third campaign ever, and the first using ***GURPS.***

Josh: A complete newcomer, this is his first experience with roleplaying games.

Even the best computer game doesn't come close to the experience of interacting with a live GM.

Important Resources: Example

Marcus spends some time reading through the ***Basic Set.*** Some chapters he reads more than once, particularly: *Creating a Character; Templates; Success Rolls; Combat; Tactical Combat; Special Combat Situations; Injuries, Illness, and Fatigue; Creating Templates;* and *Game Mastering.* He skims other chapters (the full lists of advantages, disadvantages, and skills in Chapters 2-4), or saves them for another time, when he'll actually need them (the chapters on magic, psionics, Infinite Worlds, etc.).

From the Steve Jackson Games website, he becomes familiar with what other ***GURPS*** products are available, and pokes around the ***GURPS*** forums and FAQ, looking for inspiration and tips. Finally, he prints out a number of Character Sheets and a Campaign Planning Form.

Laying the Foundation: Example

Marcus now has a good sense of how ***GURPS*** characters are created, and how the system works, mechanically – what die rolls are needed, when they are needed, and how they can be used to facilitate a fun, fair game. For the first campaign, he's leaning toward keeping things basic, with a realistic feel and modest point totals, but he's open to changing his mind if the players have different ideas.

Marcus shares with the others a list of five different games he would enjoy running, with descriptions: Old West, modern spies, superheroes, fantasy, and time travel. After reading, Josh is interested in anything *other* than Old West; Peter likes superheroes, fantasy, and Old West, in that order; and Anne votes for either fantasy or modern spies.

Fantasy seems the most agreeable for all concerned. This is the description the players chose: "Fantasy – in a world of low magic but high adventure, a group of friends sets off to seek fame and fortune. Characters built on 150 points, with no supernatural or exotic abilities. Lots of exploration and combat expected, and combat is *dangerous.*"

The group sets a date to meet for character creation and further discussion of the game, and Marcus follows the information from Chapter 1 to solidify his notes to this point.

Choosing a Genre: Fantasy. Marcus decides to stick to the ***Basic Set,*** at least in the beginning. For possible future use, he keeps in mind ***Fantasy,*** if the game goes well and he wants to add some depth to the world; ***Low-Tech,*** for additional equipment; ***Magic*** and ***Thaumatology,*** if magic begins appearing in many adventures; and ***Martial Arts,*** for once the group really masters the combat basics and wants more options.

Why Fantasy?

Fantasy was chosen for the example because, despite the staggering variety of games possible with ***GURPS,*** it is still the most widely played and recognizable genre among role-playing gamers today. Fantasy also has the benefit of being broad enough to translate well to other genres. All the advice and guidelines given for the example fantasy game are applicable to other genres.

Choosing a Style: Realistic and rules-light, using only the basic system without additional options, and no house rules. PC death is a very real possibility, with no magical or divine resurrection possible outside of very rare circumstances.

Choosing a Power Level: Characters will be created on 150 points, with no more than -25 points of disadvantages and -5 points of quirks.

Character Traits: No attribute of more than 15, and no skill higher than 18. Modern, anachronistic skills are not allowed, nor are most exotic or supernatural advantages and disadvantages (though players can certainly make a case if they really want something). Social and "Associated NPCs" traits are allowed, but should be discussed beforehand to work out details. Starting equipment is limited to anything that could reasonably be found in an average pseudo-medieval European town. Magic exists in the game world, as do nonhuman races, but neither is allowed for starting PCs. Psionics and gadgeteering do not exist at all.

Character Points in Play: Marcus will award an average of three or four points to each player individually at the end of each session, based on how well the PC was played. These awarded points can be spent on character improvement, or on the options detailed under *Influencing Success Rolls* (p. B347).

Die Rolls in Play: Marcus will determine most NPC reactions in play, with the occasional die roll for trivial encounters. The PCs may attempt Influence rolls (p. B359). Inhuman monsters, magic, and divine intervention are uncommon, but still common enough that Fright Checks are reserved for truly overwhelming events.

Using the Campaign Planning Form: Marcus commits all of the above to a Campaign Planning Form. Under the "Campaign Background" section, he jots down the name of a village, Kharston, which he decides is a town at a major crossroads in the Barony of Arteline, and home to the starting PCs.

It's time to create the heroes!

It didn't take too long for players to get attached to their characters.

– Dave Arneson

Character Creation: Example

Though he doesn't yet have an actual adventure prepared, Marcus has been thinking about it. He wants to keep things simple to start, maybe sending the PCs on an errand to retrieve or deliver something. He also wants the adventure to be a journey from their home town to the nearest trading hub.

Character Templates

Marcus creates six 140-point templates. These provide examples of the kinds of characters likely to do well in the adventure he has in mind. They allow for some player freedom, since only three are needed and there are six templates. Additionally, 10 points are left unspent, for the players to distribute as they wish. Regarding gear, starting money for a TL3 campaign is $1,000 (p. B27), though the Wealth trait can affect this.

The templates Marcus creates are archer, guard, hunter, merchant, priest, and woodsman.

Character Concepts: Example

Once the group gets together to create their PCs, Marcus presents the game as it stands so far regarding genre, style, power level, die rolls, etc. He hands around a copy of the Campaign Planning Form and answers any questions.

*Recommending to players that they buy their PCs Luck can't be emphasized enough; I'd call it one of the most important pieces of advice to any **GURPS** GM.*

– Kromm

Anne asks about starting the characters at 200 or even 250 points instead of 150, but seems satisfied when Marcus assures her that 150-point adventurers are quite capable. Peter asks if the templates are mandatory or optional, and opts not to use them when told they're optional. Otherwise, everyone is fine with the direction things are heading.

Marcus: Our first ***GURPS*** adventure will be straightforward, to give us all a chance to get used to the system and see how it works. We'll start in the PCs' hometown of Kharston, a crossroads in the Barony of Arteline, but I'd like the group to have a common goal of leaving to see the wider world around them.

I've prepared six templates that you can use as a base; they represent the kinds of characters that do well in this setting. Anne and Josh, you've decided to use the templates; Peter, you'd like to create your PC without them. Let's get to it!

Marcus hands the templates around. The players decide their three PCs all grew up together as friends in Kharston, and have recently decided to leave town in search of adventure. This gives them an excellent reason to stay together and work as a team.

Anne

Anne chooses the guard template. She wants to be competent in combat, and decides her PC has been part of the Kharston town militia for a few years. He (Anne's character is male) is only leaving town to protect his friends (played by Josh and Peter). See below for the guard template.

Looking over the template options, Anne spends 10 points for HT +1; 25 points on Combat Reflexes and High Pain Threshold; -25 points on Bad Temper, Honesty, and Light Sleeper; 4 points on Bow, and 12 points on the first melee skills package; and 4 points on Riding (Horse), First Aid, Gambling, and Search. She spends her remaining 10 unspent points on +1 to ST. She takes no quirks yet, preferring to think of them as the story progresses.

She gives the following to Marcus for review.

Beldin

150 points

Beldin is a young guardsman for the town of Kharston. He keeps both his head and face clean-shaven, and pays careful attention to dressing in proper military fashion.

ST 14 [40]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 13 [30].
Damage 1d/2d; BL 39 lbs.; HP 14 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 13 [0].
Basic Speed 6.25 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Block 11*; Dodge 10*; Parry 11*.
6'1"; 195 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 3 [0].
CF: Arteline [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

GUARD

140 points

You have experience being paid to watch over things for others, whether those things are money, livestock, or even other people. Your skill in combat isn't necessarily what other people seek you for; it can also be a reputation for honesty.

Attributes: ST 13 [30]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 12 [20].
Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d/2d-1; BL 34 lbs.; HP 13 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].
Advantages: *One* of HT +1 [10] *or* ST +1 [10]. • A further 25 points chosen from among Combat Reflexes [15], Danger Sense [15], Fit [5] *or* Very Fit [15], Hard to Kill [2/level], Hard to Subdue [2/level], High Pain Threshold [10], Luck [15], Rapid Healing [5], or Recovery [10].
Disadvantages: -25 points chosen from among Bad Temper [-10*], Bully [-10*], Honesty [-10*], Light Sleeper [-5], No Sense of Humor [-10], On the Edge [-15*], Post-Combat Shakes [-5*], or Wealth (Struggling *or* Poor) [-10 or -15].
Primary Skills: Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Fast-Draw (any) (E) DX [1]-12; Knife (E) DX [1]-12; *and* Wrestling (A) DX+1 [4]-13. • *One* of Bow (A) DX+1 [4]-13, Crossbow (E) DX+2 [4]-14, or Sling (H) DX [4]-12. • *One* of these two melee skills packages:

1. Broadsword (A) DX+2 [8]-14 *and* Shield (E) DX+2 [4]-14.
2. *One* of Spear or Staff, both (A) DX+3 [12]-15.

Secondary Skills: Armoury (Body Armor *or* Melee Weapons) (A) IQ+1 [4]-11; *and* Strategy and Tactics, both (H) IQ [4]-10.
Background Skills: *Four* of Climbing, Riding (Horse), Stealth, or Throwing, all (A) DX-1 [1]-11; First Aid or Gesture, both (E) IQ [1]-10; Gambling, Heraldry, or Streetwise, all (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Carousing (E) HT [1]-12; Hiking (A) HT-1 [1]-11; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-10; or Search or Survival (Woodlands), both (A) Per-1 [1]-9.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

Advantages

Combat Reflexes [15]; High Pain Threshold [10].

Disadvantages

Bad Temper (12) [-10]; Honesty (12) [-10]; Light Sleeper [-5].

Quirks: None, but Anne could take up to five, gaining an extra 1 point per quirk. [0]

Skills

Armoury (Melee Weapons) (A) IQ+1 [4]-11; Bow (A) DX+1 [4]-13; Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-13; Broadsword (A) DX+2 [8]-14; Fast-Draw (Sword) (E) DX [1]-13*; First Aid (E) IQ [1]-10; Gambling (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Knife (E) DX [1]-12; Riding (Horse) (A) DX-1 [1]-11; Search (A) Per-1 [1]-9; Shield (E) DX+2 [4]-14; Strategy (H) IQ [4]-10; Tactics (H) IQ [4]-10; Wrestling (A) DX+1 [4]-13.

* Includes +1 from Combat Reflexes.

Weapons and Armor

Broadsword (1d+1 cr/2d+1 cut); large knife (1d imp/2d-2 cut); short bow (1d imp); arrows (20); hip quiver; medium shield (DB 2); leather armor (torso, groin; DR 2); heavy leather leggings (legs; DR 2); heavy leather sleeves (arms; DR 2); boots (feet; DR 2, flexible).

Josh

Josh chooses the archer. He wants his character to be a good shot with a bow, with a laid-back personality. When Peter's hero began talking about leaving town, Josh's decided to join him, since he has few ties to the town other than his friends. See below for the archer template.

Looking over the template options, Josh spends 10 points for Arm ST 2; 35 points on Fit and Extraordinary Luck; -25 points on No Sense of Humor, Shyness (Mild), and Wealth (Struggling); all of the listed primary and secondary skills; and 4 points on Climbing, Riding (Horse), Hiking, and Scrounging. He spends his remaining 10 points for ST +1. Like Anne, he doesn't take any quirks yet.

He hands the following to Marcus for review.

Jax

150 points

Jax is a young farmer's son who has lived in Kharston his entire life. His hair is long and sandy brown, usually up in a ponytail, and his clothes are unkempt and ragged.

ST 12 [20]; **DX** 14 [80]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 6.25 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 9.
5'11"; 160 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 3 [0].
CF: Arteline [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Arm ST 2 [10]; Fit [5]; Extraordinary Luck [30].

Disadvantages

No Sense of Humor [-10]; Shyness (Mild) [-5]; Wealth (Struggling) [-10].

Quirks: None, but Josh could take up to five, gaining an extra 1 point per quirk. [0]

Skills

Armoury (Missile Weapons) (A) IQ [2]-10; Bow (A) DX+2 [8]-16; Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-15; Climbing (A) DX-1 [1]-13; Fast-Draw (Arrow) (E) DX+1 [2]-15; Hiking (A) HT-1 [1]-10; Knife (E) DX [1]-14; Riding (Horse) (A) DX-1 [1]-13; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-10; Shortsword (A) DX-1 [1]-13.

Weapons and Armor

Longbow (1d+2 imp*); shortsword (cheap; 1d imp/2d cut*); arrows (12); hip quiver; cloth armor (torso, groin; DR 1, flexible); cloth sleeves (DR 1, flexible); sandals (feet; DR 0).

* Damage includes Arm ST.

Peter

Peter's PC is the one who most wants to leave Kharston and strike out to see the world. He forgoes using a template, so he and Marcus spend some time discussing it.

ARCHER

140 points

You have skill with a bow and arrow, and prefer to fight from a ranged position rather than up close in the melee ranks.

Attributes: ST 11 [10]; DX 14 [80]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 11 [10].
Secondary Characteristics: Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 6.25 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].
Advantages: *One* of HT +1 [10] *or* Arm ST 2 [10]. ● A further 35 points chosen from among Acute Vision 1-3 [2/level], Combat Reflexes [15], Fit [5] *or* Very Fit [15], Luck [15] *or* Extraordinary Luck [30], Rapid Healing [5], or Recovery [10].
Disadvantages: -25 points chosen from among Bad Temper [-10*], Bully [-10*], Honesty [-10*], Light Sleeper [-5], No Sense of Humor [-10], Overconfidence [-5*], Post-Combat Shakes [-5*], Shyness (Mild *or* Severe) [-5 or -10], or Wealth (Struggling *or* Poor) [-10 or -15].
Primary Skills: Bow (A) DX+2 [8]-16; Fast-Draw (Arrow) (E) DX+1 [2]-15.
Secondary Skills: Armoury (Missile Weapons) (A) IQ [2]-10; Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-15; Knife (E) DX [1]-14; *and* Shortsword (A) DX-1 [1]-13.
Background Skills: *Four* of Climbing, Riding (Horse), Stealth, or Throwing, all (A) DX-1 [1]-13; First Aid or Gesture, both (E) IQ [1]-10; Gambling, Heraldry, or Streetwise, all (A) IQ-1 [1]-9; Carousing (E) HT [1]-11; Hiking (A) HT-1 [1]-10; Scrounging (E) Per [1]-10; or Search or Survival (Woodlands), both (A) Per-1 [1]-9.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

Peter wants a charismatic "people person." He doesn't want to be completely useless in combat, a liability to the others, but he does want his main strength to be in the ability to defuse hostile situations before they turn physical.

Marcus suggests spending points to reach an IQ of 12-14, getting a combat skill or two at 14 or more, and spending the rest on advantages and skills in support of his focus. After shuffling points around a few times, and investigating various traits from the *Trait Lists* on pp. B297-304, Peter submits the following for review.

Rory

150 points

Rory is the son of a well-known merchant in Kharston. Though he has many acquaintances, Jax and Beldin are his only real friends. Rory is a handsome young man with a youthful, pleasant face, inviting blue eyes, and chestnut brown hair. He dresses as well as he can afford to.

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 13 [60]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 13 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8.
5'10"; 150 lbs.

Social Background

TL: 3 [0].
CF: Arteline [0].
Languages: English (Native) [0].

Advantages

Attractive [4]; Charisma 2 [10]; Common Sense [10]; Sensitive [5]; Voice [10].

Disadvantages

Chummy [-5]; Gluttony (12) [-5]; Overconfidence (12) [-5]; Short Attention Span (12) [-10].

Quirks: Alcohol Intolerance; Responsive. Peter could take up to three more, gaining an extra 1 point per quirk. [-2]

Skills

Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Detect Lies (H) Per [2]-13*; Diplomacy (H) IQ+1 [2]-14†; Fast-Talk (A) IQ+2 [2]-15†; First Aid (E) IQ+1 [2]-14; Gesture (E) IQ [1]-13; Knife (E) DX+1 [2]-12; Merchant (A) IQ [2]-13; Public Speaking (A) IQ+3 [1]-16†‡; Riding (Horse) (A) DX [2]-11; Savoir-Faire (Merchant) (E) IQ [1]-13; Sex Appeal (A) HT+3 [2]-14†§; Shortsword (A) DX+3 [12]-14; Sling (H) DX-1 [2]-10; Streetwise (A) IQ [2]-13; Survival (Woodlands) (A) Per-1 [1]-12.

* Includes +1 from Sensitive.
† Includes +2 from Voice.
‡ Includes +2 from Charisma.
§ Includes +1 from Appearance.

Weapons and Armor

Large knife (1d-1 imp/1d-1 cut); shortsword (1d-1 imp/1d+1 cut); leather armor (torso, groin; DR 2); heavy leather leggings (legs; DR 2); heavy leather sleeves (arms; DR 2); boots (feet; DR 2, flexible).

Final Review: Example

Marcus looks over all the adventurers. He ensures the point totals are correct; that none of their traits are outside the established scope or above the recommended levels; that the weapons, armor, and equipment they want to buy aren't unbalancing or more than they can afford; etc.

The gear requests are all basic and common items, mostly weapons to match skills and heavy leather armor – cloth for Jax, who started with only $500 due to his Wealth (Struggling) disadvantage. Marcus moves on to reviewing traits.

Relying on defaults – whatever the game system calls them – is rarely fun. In ***GURPS,*** I hint that certain skills are necessary for adventurers, true action heroes or not, to keep the story flowing without annoying breaks caused by PCs being incompetent at tasks that adventure fiction commonly treats as "everyman" skills:

- Carousing, Diplomacy, Fast-Talk, *or* Interrogation: Eventually, everybody wants to interrogate NPCs. I'm generous about what skills work, but some skill is required.
- Climbing, Hiking, *and* Stealth: The party is only as good at these things as its worst party member, and nearly every party has to move around as a unit at some point.
- Driving *or* Riding: Travel is vital to adventure, and while "every hero can drive/ride a horse" is often assumed, it isn't automatic in games that have skills for these things.
- First Aid: Effective bandaging isn't an unskilled activity. Non-action heroes often want to do this to "contribute" to party combat effectiveness, so they especially need this skill.

- Gesture: Sooner or later, communication without making a sound will be vital to almost any party's survival.
- Observation, Scrounging, *or* Search: Noticing interesting things takes training, and finding clues and useful items is so central to adventures that no PC should lack at least basic training here.
- Savoir-Faire *or* Streetwise: Everybody came from somewhere. It's passing annoying when a player just assumes that her PC would "get on with folks in her element" without having any practical social skills to back up the assumption.

I further suggest – strongly – that action heroes have this list as well:

- Axe/Mace, Broadsword, Knife, Shortsword, *or* Staff: Wielding a stick, knife, or heavy tool to any real effect requires practice. These common improvised weapons are not idiot-proof, trivial, or safe to use without training.
- Beam Weapons, Bow, Crossbow, *or* Guns: However easy "point and shoot" looks, it's quite tough in reality. No credible action hero lacks competency at all ranged combat.
- Boxing, Brawling, *or* Karate: Fisticuffs are the worst place to be untrained. Your fists are the only weapons you always have, so learn to use them.
- Forced Entry: No, it isn't easy to kick in a door. Actually, unless you know how, you'll hurt yourself.
- Holdout: "Concealable" equipment only works if you have skill at concealment, and frustratingly few players realize this.
- Judo, Sumo Wrestling, *or* Wrestling: The number of people who think they should be able to grab others automatically is astounding. In fact, this is a difficult feat, trickier than hitting people, and absolutely requires training.
- Throwing: Whether you're tossing spare magazines to friends or grenades at enemies, this is a trained skill, so it pays to know it.

I think that players would be far less unhappy about surprises if more GMs made lists like this and did everything possible to get players to take them seriously. A PC with Brawling, Fast-Talk, Forced Entry, Holdout, Knife, Scrounging, Stealth, and Wrestling should be able to make and conceal a shiv, overpower a guard, steal his clothes, sneak away from the scene, talk his way past the other guards, and leave through an inadequately bolted back door.

Marcus notes that all three PCs have at least one armed *and* unarmed combat skill, which is good, but Beldin has the only grappling skill (Wrestling). Rory has a decent Survival skill level, and two of the three know First Aid, all of which work in the group's favor. Jax had less starting money, so his armor is the flimsier cloth, but both Beldin and Rory have decent armor made of heavy leather. Marcus points out that no one has purchased a helmet, so head shots could be a problem. They can all ride horses, useful should they ever acquire any, but some skills are lacking across the group.

Jax is the only one with any points in Climbing and Hiking, so when those skills are relevant he will either have to go alone ahead of the party, or travel as slowly as they do. No one has Stealth, problematic when sneaking around is required, and only one has Gesture.

The players decide they'll be able to work around these deficiencies for the time being – instead of reallocating points now, they'd rather start the game with the party they've created, and buy the skills they are weak in after accruing some awarded points.

Marcus: Peter, it looks like Rory has both the Common Sense advantage, and the Short Attention Span disadvantage. I'm not sure those two really go together.

Peter: They do overlap a little. But Short Attention Span only comes into play for tasks that take more than a few minutes, and if Rory fails an IQ roll for Common Sense, we can assume he failed because he got distracted by something else?

Marcus: Hmm – yeah, okay. Let's see how they work together for a few games; we can change them later if we have to. Josh, I just wanted to make sure you're still okay with Jax having the Wealth (Struggling) disadvantage?

Josh: Yeah, it's fine. You said we'd probably get paid for doing stuff, and a lot of the past games you guys talk about seemed to have treasure in them. I probably won't be poor for long.

Marcus: True, but keep in mind that even when you temporarily gain a bunch of money, Jax will still be considered "low class." He'll have money but not a nice steady job, upper-class society contacts, that sort of thing.

Josh: Yeah, that's fine.

With no more questions, the PCs are finished and ready to go! The group decides to meet back in two weeks for the first game, giving Marcus time to create the first adventure.

The essence of a role-playing game is that it is a group, cooperative experience. There is no winning or losing, but rather the value is in the experience of imagining yourself as a character in whatever genre you're involved in.

– Gary Gygax

Chapter Three

Creating the Adventure

Now that some shape has been given to the campaign, and the party is finalized, it's time to create the first adventure. There really are as many ways to create adventures as there are Game Masters! Some write pages of detailed notes; some adlib for hours off of a single index card. This chapter offers only one way of many that might be helpful for the new GM. Whatever works, whatever helps make exciting game sessions for the players with the least amount of work for the GM, is doing it right.

Important Resources for Creating the Adventure

Many of the same resources useful for preparing the game as a whole are also useful in creating adventures.

The *Basic Set*

By this point, the GM should be comfortable with most of the ***GURPS*** rules for PC creation and campaign construction. The ***Basic Set*** also contains a lot of excellent advice for designing adventures, especially *Writing Your Own Adventures* (pp. B500-504) and *Game Worlds* (pp. B505-522).

Other Books

These two books continue to provide excellent GM guidance well past the character-creation phase and into developing new adventures.

GURPS *for Dummies:* Sections relevant to adventure design are *Chapter 15: Building a Simple Adventure* (pp. 233-244), and *Part V: Building Your Own World* (pp. 251-370).

Robin's Laws of Good Gamemastering: The two chapters entitled *Campaign Design* (pp. 12-15) and *Adventure Design* (pp. 16-22) detail how to organize scenes and information for maximum effect and ease of use.

Campaign Advice

While this chapter looks at the creation of a single "adventure" (a contained story arc with a beginning, middle, and end), its format can easily be adapted for an entire campaign (a connected series of adventures). Predicting what PCs will do over the course of an entire campaign, however, is even harder than for a single adventure. By necessity, campaign notes will be even more open-ended and subject to change.

Encounters: Things to Do

An encounter is simply an interaction between the PCs and the GM's world. It can be a social encounter, with PCs and NPCs engaging in conversation; a combat encounter, with the party battling against enemies; a puzzle encounter, with the party trying to solve a mystery; or, often, some combination of all three.

One encounter leads to the next, and then the next, and in no time at all, hours have passed and it's time to break until the next game. How can the GM create engaging encounters the players will enjoy?

Rules Likely to Come Up

One of the first things a GM can do is make sure he's familiar with all of the rules likely to come up. The occasional surprise will always crop up, something unexpected will develop during game play, but the better the GM knows the rules, the fewer those surprises will be.

Concentrate first on areas the adventure will definitely cover – firearms for soldiers and secret agents, magic and psionics for wizards and psis, etc. From there, explore the less-common rules as time allows.

Character Traits

Looking over the character sheets is the easiest way to know which rules will come up. If a PC, or an NPC the party is likely to encounter, knows the Whip skill, or Breaking Blow, or has the Shapeshifting advantage, the GM should know how to handle those things during play time.

Special Combat Situations

Special Combat Situations (pp. B393-417) covers a wide array of combat situations. Things like total and partial surprise, visibility, mounted and vehicular combat, etc., won't be needed for every encounter, but are common enough to be worth knowing.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

It's important for the GM to remember that his job is to provide a variety of interesting encounters for the *whole* group to enjoy (including himself). Being a GM is like a constant juggling act, throwing in a little of this, a little of that, to cover as many bases as possible.

You'll note that ***GURPS*** doesn't price Guns and Broadsword above, say, First Aid and Freight Handling, and that a few levels of Innate Attack aren't more expensive than a few levels of Appearance. That's because the game really, truly doesn't consider combat to be the be-all, end-all adventure activity, or even the prime determiner of game balance.

Variety of Skill Tests

Switching up what skills are needed to succeed during scenes keeps the action from getting stale, particularly for those adventurers who are "one-trick ponies." Incorporate some less-common skills into encounters – maybe the easiest way to find the cultists' secret chamber is a roll against Architecture (defaults to IQ-5), or the quickest way down from a remote ski resort about to explode is to use Skiing (defaults to HT-6). Skill rolls can also be called for using relative level, and an attribute other than the usual controlling one – see *Using Skills With Other Attributes*, p. B172.

Often, many skills can be used to resolve the same situation. For one list of skills and what they're handy for, see pp. 21-22. Here is another from Kromm, divided into common modern-action tasks (for greater depth, see ***Template Toolkit 1: Characters***).

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1. Combat* (fists, blunt instruments, knives, handguns, long arms, and explosives). *Typical skills:* Brawling, Explosives, Fast-Draw, Gunner, Guns, Holdout, Knife, Shortsword, Stealth, Tactics, Throwing, Tonfa, Wrestling.

2. Detective Work† (clue-gathering, forensics, interrogation, records searches, etc.). *Typical skills:* Administration, Criminology, Detect Lies, Forensics, Intelligence Analysis, Interrogation, Research, Search, Streetwise.

3. Fixing*† (forging IDs, procuring weapons, smuggling gear, and cleaning up afterward). *Typical skills:* Fast-Talk, Filch, Forgery, Freight Handling, Holdout, Merchant, Pickpocket, Scrounging, Smuggling, Stealth, Streetwise.

4. Intrusion* (neutralizing alarms, cameras, dogs, doors, fences, locks, and so on). *Typical skills:* Acrobatics, Animal Handling, Climbing, Electronics Repair (Security), Escape, Forced Entry, Jumping, Lockpicking, Stealth, Traps.

5. Medicine (the big areas being first aid and field surgery). *Typical skills:* Biology, Chemistry, Diagnosis, Electronics Operation (Medical), First Aid, Pharmacy, Physician, Poisons, Surgery, Veterinary.

6. Observation*† (scouting, shadowing, spotting, and surveillance from without). *Typical skills:* Body Language, Camouflage, Climbing, Electronics Operation, Gesture, Lip Reading, Observation, Photography, Shadowing, Stealth.

7. Social Engineering (deals, deceptions, disguises, lies, threats, etc.). *Typical skills:* Acting, Carousing, Detect Lies, Diplomacy, Disguise, Fast-Talk, Intimidation, Propaganda, Savoir-Faire, Sex Appeal, Streetwise.

8. Survival*‡ (camouflage, orienteering, outdoorsmanship, and similar). *Typical skills:* Camouflage, Climbing, Hiking, Meteorology, Naturalist, Navigation, Running, Skiing, Stealth, Survival, Tracking, Traps.

9. Technology (both the computers-and-sensors kind and fixing-guns-and-cars variety). *Typical skills:* Armoury, Computer Operation, Computer Programming, Electrician, Electronics Operation, Electronics Repair, Machinist, Mechanic.

10. Transportation (driving mainly, but also boating and piloting, and navigating). *Typical skills:* Area Knowledge, Boating, Crewman, Driving, Navigation, Piloting, Shiphandling.

* Stealth isn't its own thing at all. It's part of many things – mainly these. You can't really snipe, smuggle gear, break in, spy on people, or skulk around in the bush if you aren't stealthy. In fact, all action heroes ought to be stealthy.

† These often get ignored, but at the PCs' peril. I've seen more plans fail because the heroes went in without the necessary intelligence (detective work and observation) and equipment (fixing) than for any other reason.

‡ This is the most optional area, becoming kind of pointless if all the adventures take place in cities.

Consider the following example from Kromm of searching a room for clues.

Rooms are so big that you need separate skills for different things (on top of basic Perception for things sitting out in the open):

- *Architecture* for hidden features of the room itself.
- *Carpentry* to notice something odd with the woodwork.
- *Criminology* to find macroscopic evidence left behind by a criminal.
- *Electrician* to spot something strange about the lights or wiring.
- *Forensics* to discover traces of blood, explosives, fibers, etc.
- *Masonry* to identify unusual stonework.
- *Observation* to "case the joint."
- *Tracking* to pick up on footprints on the floor.
- *Traps* for traps and secret doors.

These do overlap some, of course. The GM could allow a single Detective! roll for all of it, I suppose, but as that skill implies, this would be cinematic. Real detectives ask forensic scientists, firemen, the locksmith, etc. to take a look for a good reason.

Generally, you have to read skill descriptions to learn about possible skill uses. This is because a full list of actions and necessary skills would be as long as Chapter 4!

The next example from Kromm demonstrates different ways to gather information.

In ***GURPS,*** as in real life, there are dozens of ways to get info using one's skills.

- *Administration* to glean info from a bureaucrat, either through discussion or by filling out the right forms to request it.
- *Area Knowledge* to know where people with useful information hang out so that you can bribe, trick, spy on, or otherwise interact with them.
- *Carousing* to buy a few rounds and get information at a pub or a tavern.
- *Current Affairs* – a simple roll will often suffice once you've spent some time catching up on the latest news.
- *Fast-Talk* to pry information from somebody who knows what you need to know and who shouldn't talk . . . but who is easily bamboozled.
- *Intelligence Analysis* to discover useful info in the reports of people who use these other skills.
- *Interrogation* to squeeze information out of somebody you corner or capture.
- *Lip Reading, Observation, Shadowing, Stealth,* etc., to spy out information the hard way.
- *Merchant* to buy information legally.
- *Politics* to glean info from a politician, perhaps by promising cash support or by convincing him that something untoward is going on under his nose and that you can help if he fills you in on a few facts.
- *Research* to find information in records of some kind.
- *Savoir-Faire* to glean info from somebody in the relevant social group by convincing him that you're a peer who "needs to know."
- *Sex Appeal* to get information from a horndog.
- *Streetwise*, either to find people to bribe, interrogate, and spy on, or simply to walk the streets, make contacts, and hear rumors.

Action 2: Exploits, pp. 11-30, further outlines ways of using skills to find and hide information, penetrate and secure locations, etc. For a discussion of skills specifically beneficial to interaction encounters, peruse ***Social Engineering.***

Let Each PC Shine

Be sure every PC will have a chance to be in the spotlight. A party consisting of a computer hacker, a demolitions expert, and an ex-soldier is not well-served by a constant stream of firefights. The hacker and the demolitions guy need scenes, too, where their skills at computer wizardry and blowing things up will be of value.

Player Freedom

One of the great advantages RPGs have over other mediums is the freedom afforded to players. Even the best computer game doesn't come close to the experience of interacting with a live GM. Within that context, though, lies a spectrum of play styles as to how adventures are written, and how much freedom the players truly have.

Linear Plots

On one end of the spectrum are linear plots. The party starts at point A and is assumed to proceed to point B, then point C, continuing to follow preset encounters until finally reaching the climactic final scene. A great framework for this kind of game is PCs who work directly for an NPC who gives them specific missions – a police sergeant, military commander, spymaster, etc.

Though often negatively referred to as "railroading," linear encounters are an entirely valid style of play, enjoyed by many. The advantage to the GM is that it's much easier to prepare encounters, since the PCs have fewer options of what they can do and where they can go. For players who prefer a more open approach, this is also the disadvantage.

The Sandbox

The other end of the spectrum is sometimes called "sandbox gaming," referring to the group's ability to go anywhere and do anything, regardless of its impact on the story ("playing in the sandbox"). If the GM prepared a series of encounters revolving around tracking down an escaped fugitive, and the PCs decide they don't care about that and would rather rob a bank instead, that work was wasted (unless he recycles those encounters – see *The Illusion of Freedom*, p. 26). Although the players have much more freedom, it's not a style of play for the GM who prefers preparation to improvisation.

Following the Players' Lead

One way to combine all of these approaches is to let the players provide the ideas for how the game will progress. As they roam free (like a sandbox game), pay careful attention to where their interests lie, and what sorts of things they enjoy. Then place those things in their path (preserving the illusion of freedom), ultimately leading the group through a linear plot they themselves constructed.

For example, let's say a group of PC mercenaries has just completed a long contract. As they spend time recuperating, two of them have a conversation about the miserable backwater country they're in – it's always hot, the bugs are a nightmare, and the possibility of attack is nearly constant. The GM also remembers that before this modern-day campaign started, some of the players were raving about a new horror movie, about a werewolf loose in Victorian London.

Putting these things together, the GM offers the mercenaries a job through their usual contact: someone, or something, is killing people in the back alleys of Chicago, and the government, unable to find the culprit, wants to hire an "off the books" team to covertly investigate. If they take the job, this gets the party back to a more urban environment, and a break from the constant firefights. The GM has no idea who or what is killing in Chicago, but the players have no shortage of theories for him to choose from; as their adventurers fly back to the U.S., cultists, a serial killer, monsters, and aliens are all mentioned as possibilities.

A GM who likes to improvise, with communicative players, can sustain a campaign like this indefinitely!

In the Middle

Many GMs use both approaches, allowing PCs to roam the sandbox until they find something they want to pursue, then creating encounters to resolve that story line before returning to the sandbox. As long as everyone, GM included, is having fun, neither style is inherently better than the other.

The Illusion of Freedom

Regardless of play style, you can often maintain the illusion of player freedom by simply staying flexible as to where and when encounters occur. No matter what the notes say, nothing becomes "real" to the protagonists in the game world until they actually experience it. Up to that moment, the GM can make any changes he likes, assuming they fit the setting and follow logically from previous events.

A classic example is an adventuring party traveling through the wilderness and coming to a fork in the road. Assume the GM has created a small keep as an encounter, complete with some memorable NPCs and a few adventure hooks. If the GM has already told the players the keep is along the left road, or given them a map showing the keep on the left road, then in the game world that's where the keep is. If they choose to travel the road on the right, there is no logically consistent way they will arrive at the keep.

However, if the keep was not previously mentioned, the GM can place it along whichever road the party chooses to travel – if they go left, it's along the left road; if they go right, it's along the right road – and as far as the game world (and the players) are concerned, that's where it has always been. Similarly, the keep the GM created doesn't have to be a keep. If the party knows the keep is along the left road, and they choose to travel the right road, perhaps they eventually come upon a crossroads inn, where many of the same NPCs and adventure hooks from the keep now reside.

To some, this may seem somehow sneaky or underhanded. However, enjoying an RPG is about the willing suspension of disbelief – players want to lose themselves in an imaginary world for a time, pretending to be a fictional character. As long as the wires behind the scenes, holding the sets together, don't intrude into the game, most players don't care much about *how* they get to the fun. They just care about getting there.

NPCs: People to Meet

In the course of their adventures, the players and their PCs will meet a multitude of nonplayer characters (NPCs). These are the enemies they steal from, and the merchants they do business with; those in need who seek their help, and the bosses who order them into missions; the downtrodden they protect, and the villains they protect them from. In short, they are everyone in the world who isn't a PC.

As with all things encounter-related, variety is key. The heroes should have to deal with people who are funny, morose, tall, short, loud, quiet, young, old, and a thousand other distinguishing characteristics. It's far too much work to provide stats for *every* NPC. Luckily, there's no reason to – for the majority, one or two personality traits or motivation suffice ("Blackie the Fence – greedy and cautious; speaks in hushed tones; wants to earn enough gold to move out of the Pit").

For those more important to the story, or who might end up in combat, filling in an NPC Record Card (p. B569) is recommended. Major villains, Dependents, and the like might require a full character sheet of their own.

NPCs Are People, Too

The majority of NPC interactions are social, not combat related. Portraying everyone the party meets as "real" people, not as two-dimensional backdrops who exist solely for the benefit of the PCs, is a critical GM skill. When the game world feels authentic and alive, it draws players more fully into the story, and one of the best ways to do that is by populating the world with memorable, fully realized people.

Not every NPC needs his own character sheet, or even stat block. However, he should have at least one or two qualities defined, ones that set him apart. This makes it easier for the GM to imagine how the person will respond in the most logical or dramatic way in whatever situations arise. For those who could react randomly, the GM can use 3d to determine reaction (see *Reaction Rolls*, pp. B494-495).

For example, consider a small gambling hall that the heroes like to frequent. As they spend a lot of time there, the GM has created six or so NPC regulars, and defined broad qualities for them. Four of them are present in the hall this particular night.

Jonn: Sociable bartender; loves his wife and daughter above all else.

Loody: Mentally dim but physically huge bouncer. Very friendly, thinks of the gambling hall regulars as his family.

Greta: Quiet and stern bouncer, just earning enough gold to move on.

Tess: Took a job as a serving girl to case the gambling hall. She's actually a thief, and plans to clean out the owner's safe.

Just a line or two for each is enough to predict behavior. When a drunken patron accuses a card dealer of cheating, knocks his table over, and starts throwing punches, the GM uses those qualities to decide how they react. Jonn ducks behind the bar, and waits for everything to be over – this is just a job to him; he isn't going to take needless risks with a family at home. Loody immediately springs into action to protect his "brother," the dealer, and attempts to pull the drunk off of him. Greta gets ready for action, but doesn't actually bother to help unless it looks like Loody can't control the drunk alone. Tess feigns fear and steps away from the fight, keeping one hand on the slender dagger concealed in her sleeve "just in case." The dealer isn't one of the NPCs with assigned qualities, so the GM just decides he throws up his hands in unskilled defense and hopes the bouncers are paying attention.

Balancing NPCs With the Party

The GM new to ***GURPS*** may be curious about balancing enemies against the PCs in combat, without making them either too challenging or not challenging enough.

This section broadly discusses how to estimate this, and how to make changes as needed during game play.

Despite all the points and rules, ***GURPS*** isn't a highly objective, prescriptive system where the roleplaying is actually a thin veil over a set of PvP rules. You cannot rely on its mechanics to gauge threats and outcomes very precisely. It's designed to be used by a GM running a game with a group of players in a more-or-less cooperative fashion, and it tacitly assumes that the GM will sometimes fudge outcomes to get dramatic results. So be prepared to do that – if the bad guys are getting destroyed a second after unleashing their ambush, have their cut-off group or security element show up as reinforcements, have the wizard use his "secret weapon" Lesser Wish amulet to score a critical hit, etc. If the bad guys are winning too easily, have them get overconfident and use bad tactics, or simply have one fall down if he suffers so much as a nick. Really, if you're good at thinking on your feet, you can make any group of foes a suitable match for the PCs.

Staying flexible and fluid during NPC interactions is the best way to keep encounters challenging without becoming overwhelming.

NPCs are more than a set of numbers.

Point Totals and Overall Power

One of the most important things to remember about NPCs is that, unlike the PCs, *overall point totals do not matter at all.* While it's tempting to think that a 200-point NPC is the equal of a 200-point PC, it simply isn't true. *How* points are spent is infinitely more important than *how many* are spent.

The classic example is the 200-point accountant. He has a very high IQ, a number of mathematics- and accounting-related skills, maybe advantages like Eidetic Memory and Lightning Calculator, etc. He will also quickly die a horrible death at the hands of a 50-point warrior with points spent in combat skills.

For an even match, simply make the adversaries' average skill, defenses, damage, and DR equal to the PCs' averages in those areas. You can probably vary one up a point or two if you vary another downward a similar amount. To make things tougher, raise one or two numbers without lowering anything. To make things easier, drop a score or two without raising anything. Don't try to evaluate every last special consideration . . . just eyeball it ("Okay, the guy with the bow is a Weapon Master, so I had better give him lower defenses to keep him even." "Hm, the guy with the spear has Berserk and probably won't even defend himself, so I'll give him better armor to even things out.").

Don't overlook specialization, either. If your four 150-point PCs are all battle mages, then a single tough warrior with Magic Resistance 20 might be able to defeat the lot of them. If they're four 150-point karate masters, then an intangible, life-draining spirit they can't hit *will* kill them all. Points don't mean much; you have to check every single special ability against every single other one.

The key to successful threat-matching in ***GURPS*** is to know the particular group – its numbers, strengths, weaknesses, and tactics – and create foes to match. One monster who plays to weaknesses is a lot scarier than 10 who play to strengths . . . hordes of *anything* are generally scary if they can surround the heroes . . . and bad tactics can seriously hose the PCs.

This process is not for the GM who prefers NPCs to simply exist, objectively, with no relation to the party's abilities. For those who want to balance combat encounters, look at each PC, assess the party's average ability to inflict and absorb damage, and create threats based specifically on those numbers.

It's a multi-step process:

1. Keep track of precisely how much Bash-O-Matic power the PCs have, and in what areas.
2. Give *most* important NPC opponents just enough Absorb-O-Matic power to soak up most of the bashing. Yes, this *does* mean tailoring encounters to the PCs' current abilities and power level instead of being a dire simulationist, saying that the bad guys are "like so" no matter what, and letting the PCs suffer if they aren't up to it or yawn if it's a cakewalk. This will make fights challenging.
3. Once in a while, insert baddies who aren't meant to pose a real challenge. The PCs should blow through these in seconds. This is fine – it's intended to reassure the players that yes, the PCs *are* truly Bash-O-Matic in the grand scheme.
4. Also once in a while, insert baddies who cannot easily be bashed aside, for whatever reason. These guys take strategy and ultimately luck to defeat, and probably can't be defeated without consuming limited resources (ammo, batteries, healing potions, FP, and even character points spent to adjust success rolls) and/or seriously harming some of the PCs (*killing* them, if they don't plan and strategize). These encounters generate the "Woah – that was close!" moments.

Alternate 2, 3, and 4 so that the heroes know that they're butt-kickers, but also know that they can have their butts handed to them if they take victory for granted. If you go with 2 all the time, it'll eventually feel like 3. If you go with 3 all the time, you'll get boredom and no memorable war stories. If you go with 4 all the time, your players will hate you!

For example, for a party consisting of three adventurers with DR 4, DR 6, and DR 8, the average DR is 6 – to be a threat, evenly matched enemies should be able to inflict at *least* 7 points of damage on an average attack, whether by sword stroke, arrow shot, gunfire, or whatever. (Also keep in mind how different damage types interact with different types of armor – see p. B282.) If the three PCs dish out damage on an average attack of 5, 7, and 9 points, respectively, the average attack is 7 – opponents with a DR less than 7 are likely to be wounded quickly, while those with a DR of 7 or more have a better chance of surviving long enough to inflict some damage of their own.

Because of the way ***GURPS*** combat works, the "zeroth-order" approximation is "number of foes = number of PCs." Most combatants have *on the order of* 10 HP and the same odds (3 or 4 on 3d) of scoring a lucky, possibly fight-stopping critical hit. And most combatants have the same odds (17 or 18 on 3d) of screwing up in a way that makes them vulnerable even to a small child with a chucked marble.

Efforts to fold points into the equation quickly fail, as points don't measure combat effectiveness or even physical effectiveness, but a grand average of character effectiveness over all possible activities – including stealth, travel, invention, trade, politics, study, and even romance – taking into account physical, mental, social, and supernatural factors.

The fact that NPC point totals are so arbitrary allows the GM a great deal of freedom in selecting their traits. They can have abilities like those found under *Absolutes* (***Powers***, pp. 117-119), things like true invulnerability, which ***GURPS*** doesn't even try to describe with points. Some effects just *are*, for purposes of story, and have no associated point cost.

Attributes and Skills

You don't need to assign attributes and skills to every foe individually. It's quicker and easier to assign broad "bands" of ability to large groups. In a raiding party of eight orcs, maybe six are just general grunts, led by two sergeants; against a war band of a dozen alien shock troops, maybe 10 are soldiers of the line, led by one sergeant and a much more capable lieutenant.

The types of advantages and skills must be taken into account as well.

For instance:

- Superhuman foes that have high DR, lots of HP, or traits like Supernatural Durability or Unkillable might very well use All-Out Attack (Determined) every turn, because they don't desperately need to defend themselves. Treat them as +4 to skill. A "mook" zombie who can attack every turn at +4 and has to be chopped to small pieces before he's a non-threat might have an on-paper skill of 10, but he's effectively skill 14.
- If the PCs are affected by the environment but their foes are not – the battle is at night, but the foes have Night Vision; the battle is in a bog, but they have Terrain Adaptation; the battle is on a narrow beam, but they have Perfect Balance; etc. – you need to make the comparison using the PCs' modified skill.

Also, there's the fact that ST matters in low-tech combat. I'd probably match ST+skill instead of just skill. A ST 20 monster swinging a weapon that can break a shield or snap a sword in one shot might make short work of a ST 10 PC who uses light weapons. If he brings friends, and they slam, grapple, and dogpile . . . well . . .

Equipment

The equipment foes are armed with also has a large impact on how challenging they are. A band of goblins armed with rusted, crumbling weapons can be swept aside; that same band armed with fine quality, enchanted weapons from an uncovered wizard's cache are suddenly much more dangerous!

This is particularly true if the PCs have acquired any sort of powerful or exotic means of defense. If their stellar pirates were lucky enough to find military-grade personal force screens, they may begin thinking they are nearly invulnerable – until they meet a rival crew with experimental sonic weapons that ignore force screens altogether.

A few traits can increase the effectiveness of weapons. The Weapon Bond perk improves skill (see. p. 54); weapon quality can boost damage or affect Acc/Malf. (see p. 56); and the Signature Gear advantage makes it much harder to lose weapons or gear while adventuring (p. B85).

Outnumbering the Party

Another common way to challenge the party is to simply outnumber them. A larger group of enemies can take advantage of numerical superiority in many ways.

Sample Low-Tech Guards/Thugs/Soldiers

Here are a couple of broad examples from Kromm of enemies that might be thrown at a party in a low-tech game. Even as the PCs grow in power, these enemies can remain challenging simply by using more of them.

Generic Enemy

50 points

ST 11 [10]; **DX** 11 [20]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 11 [10].
Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 11 [0].
Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0]; Dodge 8; Parry 10; Block 10.

Disadvantages: Some antisocial traits, like Bad Temper or Bloodlust, just to make it fun [-10]; Duty (Whoever sent him after the PCs; 12 or less) [-10].
Skills: Brawling-12 [2]; Primary DX/A Weapon Skill-14 [12]; Secondary DX/A Weapon Skill-12 [4]; Shield-14 [8]; Wrestling-12 [4].

Elite Enemy

100 points

ST 12 [20]; **DX** 12 [40]; **IQ** 10 [0]; **HT** 12 [20].
Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 12 [0].
Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0]; Dodge 10*; Parry 12*; Block 12*.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes [15].
Disadvantages: Antisocial traits, like Bad Temper or Bloodlust [-10]; Duty (Whoever sent him after the PCs; 12 or less) [-10]; Fanaticism (Some foul cause, unpleasant villain, etc.) [-15].
Skills: Brawling-12 [1]; Fast-Draw (Primary Weapon)-13* [1]; Leadership-10 [2]; Primary DX/A Weapon Skill-16 [16]; Secondary DX/A Weapon Skill-12 [2]; Shield-16 [12]; Tactics-10 [4]; Wrestling-12 [2].

* Includes +1 from Combat Reflexes.

If you're specifically angling for tactics for NPCs to use vs. highly skilled PCs, and the NPCs are Nameless and Expendable, several things work:

- *Armies of fanatical, mindless, or berserk goons.* Some will inevitably get to the sides (-2 to defenses) or behind (no active defense!). And if you're rolling to hit dozens of times, you're likely to get a lucky critical hit or two. Not to mention that enough slams or grapples will eventually work and immobilize the high-skill target . . . after he hacks apart the first 10 idiots who try.
- *Goons that ambush with ranged weapons.* If the goons get a few shots each before the skilled foes can retaliate effectively, they're likely to get one or two lucky hits – especially if there are many goons shooting at once!
- *Goons that cheat.* If the goons are hiding behind a door, or invisible, or on the far side of a hidden pit, skill becomes unimportant. Hidden goons get a free shot with no defense possible, while goons with traps can just let the traps do their job and then poke the trapped victims from afar using long spears.
- *Monster goons.* Monsters with 50, 60 – heck, *100* – HP get to roll to hit so often before going down that they might get lucky. Those that are surrounded in flame, emit rings of frost, ooze poison, etc. can hurt their foes just by standing around. Of course, those that drip acid blood or explode on dying turn the skilled killers' skill against them!
- *Screening goons.* A big army of goons that do nothing but All-Out Defend and occupy all the space between their skilled foes and some Really Bad Wizard, Super, or Psi can do loads of harm by being living armor for their boss. While the heroes cut their way through the goons, Mr. Nasty can blast them with impunity.

Combine as needed. If the PCs walk into a room and are simultaneously showered with arrows and dropped upon from above, then have to fend off three human-wave attacks, and *then* have to chop up Mr. Nasty's bodyguards, all the while being pecked by swarms of ravens and blasted by Nasty's Cerebral Doom Blasts, they probably won't even notice that the goons are all skill-10 losers.

Enemies who, individually, would be no threat at all quickly become dangerous in large numbers.

Turning the Options Dials

Another way to adjust combat lethality is to allow and disallow particular combat options for different types of enemy. Take a roving gang of six thugs as an example. It's made up of four rank-and-file members, one slightly older and tougher thug, and one streetwise, experienced leader. The GM decides that the four average members will all choose to All-Out Attack most turns, and if their HP ever reach 0, they are automatically out of the fight (no HT rolls to stay conscious). The tougher thug won't All-Out Attack, but instead likes to aim for the face and try for a knockout; he makes HT rolls as normal below 0 HP. As for the leader, the GM treats him like a PC – he can use Deceptive Attacks, Feints, extra effort, anything a PC could use, and will be the hardest to take down.

NPCs Fear Death, Too

In the game world, NPCs are people, too. They aren't just roaming collections of numbers, waiting to be racked up as victories by the first PC they come across. They have things like homes, motivations, people they love, etc.

With this in mind, combat shouldn't always be a kill-or-be-killed bloodbath. The NPCs should consider retreating or surrendering if it becomes clear they are outmatched. Combatants willing to die for their cause should be reserved for things like crazed cultists, kamikaze-style warriors, and alien drones of a hive-mind.

SETTINGS: PLACES TO SEE

One of the most wonderful things about RPGs is that the action can take place, literally, *anywhere.* There are no budgets for sets, no logistical costs for "shooting on location." Through their characters and imaginations, the players can explore ancient ruins on Mars, the gladiatorial arenas of Imperial Rome, forgotten worlds in the center of the Earth, fantastic cities beneath the ocean, and anything else they can dream up – in some campaigns, maybe all in the same game! Be creative when deciding where the action takes place.

COMBAT ENVIRONMENT

The physical environment of the game world provides numerous opportunities to challenge the players and their adventurers, especially during combat. Many more tips for increasing the threat of NPC enemies are given in pp. 43-61. For designing the basics of combat encounters, keep the following in mind, as well as other information in *Special Combat Situations* (pp. B393-417).

Room to Move: Tight quarters, such as aboard a submarine or inside an elevator, necessitate close combat, and have a big impact on actions. Retreating is more difficult, or even impossible, and a shield inflicts a penalty equal to its Defense Bonus (p. B392). Melee weapons with a Reach greater than "C" either can't be used (pp. B391-392), or suffer -4 for every yard of Reach (***Martial Arts,*** p. 117). Ranged weapons can be used, but at a penalty equal to their Bulk.

Range and Speed: As explained on p. B550, the faster a target is moving, and/or the farther away it is, the more difficult it is to hit. For a quicker, streamlined way to figure range, see *Simplified Range* on p. 7 of ***Gun Fu*** or p. 36 of ***Action 2: Exploits.***

Visibility: Encounters at night, in fog or smoke, or against invisible foes use the rules for visibility found on p. B394, penalizing both attack and defense rolls.

Noise: Rackety environments will, naturally, make it harder to hear things – exact penalties are up to the GM. As an optional rule, each "step" of the *Hearing Distance Table* (p. B358) can count as -1. For example, hearing normal conversation is at -1 in light traffic, but at -4 in normal traffic; hearing loud conversation is at -1 in a noisy office, and at -6 at a very loud rock band's concert; etc.

Cover: Simply placing an enemy behind full or partial cover makes him much more of a challenge – the PCs will have to either aim for specific or random hit locations, or try to shoot through the cover (pp. B407-408).

Footing: Don't assume all combats take place on level fields devoid of debris. Bad footing penalizes both attack rolls and active defenses (pp. B547-549). Movement through such areas is also much slower (see *Bad Footing*, p. B387).

Weapon Reach and Range: Enemies armed with weapons that allow them to stay out of the party's range are *dangerous* – they can attack without being attacked in return, at least not without considerable effort. Common examples include distant snipers (especially against those lacking long-range weapons), and fighters with melee weapons of Reach 2 or 3 who retreat after each attack (p. B388). For even more detailed rules on using Reach in combat, see *Dealing with Charging Foes* (***Martial Arts,*** p. 106), and *A Matter of Inches* (***Martial Arts,*** p. 110).

Attacks From Above or Below: Attacks from above are surprising, and can result in a penalty to active defense, no active defense at all, or even temporarily losing turns to inaction (p. B402). Just fighting at different levels can impose combat penalties (pp. B402-403, B407).

Attacks From Behind or Side: Most fighters attacked from behind or from a side hex suffer penalties to their active defense (side hex), or get no defense at all (behind). They also suffer restrictions on which defenses they can use they can use, making attacking from off-front hexes a great tactic for enemies. See *Defending in Tactical Combat* (pp. B390-391).

Unusual Environments: Sometimes, the scene takes place under novel circumstances. See *Settings Variety* (below) for some ideas.

Setting Variety

The mantra of the GM applies here – variety is the spice of life. An unending stream of sword-and-shield flurries, firearms vs. body armor, or energy weapons against force screens all eventually grow stale. ***GURPS*** provides rules for all kinds of bizarre settings and obstacles for heroes to experience.

For uncommon environments, see the rules for atmosphere, pressure, and vacuum (pp. B429-430, B435, B437); using an environment suit (p. B192); extreme cold, extreme heat, and fire (pp. B430, B433-434); gravity, acceleration, and motion sickness (pp. B434, B436); radiation (pp. B435-436); relying on senses under unusual conditions (p. B358); and the effects of terrain on using Survival (pp. B223-224) and Tracking (p. B226) skills.

For unusual threats, challenge the PCs with things like acid (p. B428), which can damage armor that otherwise protects the wearer; collisions and falls (pp. B430-432), which inflict blunt trauma (p. B379) through all types of armor (not just flexible); disease and infection (pp. B442-444); drugs and poisons (pp. B437-441); and even electricity (pp. B432-433).

To keep obstacles fresh, think of threats that most normal armor and defenses are powerless against. Magic, psionics, nanites, shrink rays, ghosts and similar situations all offer ways to enliven encounters by presenting threats outside the norm, and challenging players to respond in new ways.

Putting It on Paper

Now, it's time to commit some ideas to paper (or hard drive, memory, or whatever you use). How much to write down is very subjective. Some GMs write nothing down and improvise from a few ideas they thought up in the shower. Others craft meticulous notes and charts, preferring to err on the side of too much preparation over not enough.

Most people are somewhere in the middle, writing down what they consider important and leaving the rest to be filled in as the game marches along. Whatever suits your individual style is the best way to go! Below are some guidelines for preparing at least a basic structure. Again, this is in no way "the official ***GURPS*** way to do things." It is only one example of a simple method for organizing your notes.

I must admit that I don't craft individual adventures. I have all kinds of plot threads going on at once, connected in nonlinear ways, and there's never any real "resolution," although some become less important, merge with other threads, etc. I think you'll find that the more you develop a *campaign,* the fewer discrete adventures you'll have. This is especially true if your game simulates a world as opposed to focusing on a few dramatic occurrences surrounding the PCs.

If you run a game like this, the players will always have the choice of ignoring a particular thread, jumping between threads, exploring lots of threads at once, forcing two threads to merge, etc. Even if each thread *is* fairly linear, and borders on railroading the PCs, the existence of the options above gives the players a lot of control over where any given session is going.

Players often take unexpected turns and make surprising choices, which is why it's sometimes said "no plan survives contact with the PCs." Still, having some underlying structure to depart from if needed is often easier than ad libbing *everything.*

The Plot

Start with a brief overview of what is *expected* to happen during the adventure. For example: "The party will accept a job to break into Tyler Labs and retrieve a weapon prototype," or "Once done recuperating from last week's attack by the Baron's men, the party will continue to track him into the swamp."

It's always possible the party will choose to do something completely unrelated to this plot, so brainstorm options ahead of time. These alternate plot paths don't need to be fleshed out in detail; they are just available so *something* exists to use as a starting point if needed. Some example alternates paths based on the main premises given above: "If the party refuses the job, they may either notice they are being followed by government agent types, or Shamus may come looking for them to collect on their debt," or "If the party gives up the chase of the Baron, they may either encounter a hostile tribe of swamp-dwelling fairies on their way out, or their guide will contract malaria, making it much more difficult to find their way back to town."

The NPCs

Next, start to list some key NPCs the party is likely to encounter, including where they might be found. Although this list will grow as specific scenes are created later, having a spot to keep all the NPCs together makes it easier to find information about them when needed.

Each NPC could get his relevant details and stats on an NPC Record Card (p. B569), with a master list in the adventure's notes; otherwise, create a special section with the relevant information. Some NPCs (minor background, easy-to-defeat enemies) only need a line or two of description. Some (recurring NPCs, slightly tougher opponents) require at least basic combat and trait info. Still others (major bosses, Dependents, Allies, etc.) may deserve nearly the equivalent of a full character sheet.

Encounters and Scenes

Once the NPC list is started, describe all of the major scenes, in the order they are most likely to be encountered. Some GMs prefer bullet lists for ease of reading, but use whatever is clear and easy for you.

The Challenges

Detail each encounter, including any information you might need to run the PCs through it:

- NPCs the party might meet.
- How each NPC is likely to react at that time.
- Tactics each NPC might use if combat erupts.
- What the area looks like, including any environmental penalties (vision, bad footing, etc.) and notable features or objects.
- What the party is expected to do during the encounter.
- What results from success or failure at this encounter (the results could be the same in either case, or success and failure could each lead to their own new scene).
- Any other important notes.

Here's an example:

Shamus' Warehouse: If the party needs to replenish their supplies and ammunition from Shamus before hitting the Tyler Labs compound, they can find him at his usual warehouse hangout. They arrive just in time to see two men who look like government agents leaving in a black SUV – successful Per-2 rolls reveal both men are armed with SMGs beneath their jackets.

While purchasing their supplies from Shamus, he doesn't mention the two men. If asked about them, he will be vague and uncooperative. If the party successfully intimidates him or otherwise gets him to talk, he reveals that the men were looking for the party, and gave him a phone number to call if he saw them (though Shamus swears he wouldn't have called).

From here, the PCs can either continue on to the job at Tyler Labs or investigate the phone number. If their contacts and hacking skills are up to it, the number leads back to a cheap prepaid phone, not to a government office.

After creating this encounter, you would go back and list Shamus and the two agents in the NPC section. Shamus probably only needs quick personality notes, as his main function is to sell equipment and weapons to the PCs. The agents could use a short breakdown of attributes, relevant skills, and weapons, as it's possible they'll get into a firefight with the party.

Maps

Some encounters run more smoothly if there is a map of the area. If you think the party might get into a fight there, having a map can reduce confusion and aid visualization. In the above example, if the warehouse is never more than a big abandoned building where Shamus conducts business, no map is necessary.

A game map can be as simple as a quick sketch on the back of a character sheet, or a full-color drawing created on a computer. Most GMs use both, and more, with quick outlines for background locales, and highly detailed maps for prominent areas.

Possible Outcomes

When all encounters have been listed, note some possible outcomes for the finished adventure, along with associated rewards. (These outcomes are in addition to those specified for each encounter.) Describe at least one for success, one for failure, and one or two for "other."

Success

A successful completion naturally depends on what the goal of the initial plot was. Usually, it'll be something like "rescued the princess," "found the missing painting," "prevented the assassination," etc. Give the best rewards for success.

Failure

Failure to complete an adventure also depends on the initial goal. Common failures are along the lines of "didn't prevent the bomb from exploding," "couldn't find the enemy stronghold," "didn't break the code in time," etc. Rewards for failure are the lowest of all – if there even are any.

Other

Most plots allow for outcomes that aren't full failures or successes – "the ambassador wasn't killed, but was severely injured," "the escaped convict is still on the loose, and he's somewhere in Las Vegas," "we found the missing laptop, but it was destroyed in the process," etc. The rewards for these middle-ground outcomes are better than those for failure, but not as good as those for success.

Rewards

The rewards for adventure completion break down into two types: *in-game rewards* (for the adventurer) and *bonus character points* (for the player). Ideally, success should give a little of both.

In-game rewards are things the *character* can use, like money, gold, jewels, and equipment upgrades. Don't forget less-tangible rewards, such as a new Contact or Patron, or an increase in Reputation.

Character points are a "meta" reward. They do not exist to the PC, in the game world, but only as tools for the *player* to use for character improvement by increasing attributes or skill levels. The GM may even let players use unspent points to affect rolls (p. B347) or reduce damage taken (p. B417), increasing their versatility; see also ***Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys.***

Once the GM is happy with the adventure he's created, he feels it'll be as much fun for the players to experience as for him to run it, it's time to get together for the first actual play session. Tips for handling this are covered in Chapter 5.

For an example of creating a group's first adventure, see Chapter 4.

Chapter Four
Example of Adventure Creation

The agreed-upon campaign premise is that all three of the PCs (Jax, Rory, and Beldin, played by Josh, Peter, and Anne) grew up together in the town of Kharston. They are a bit older now, and want to leave the town to see the world. See Chapter 2 for more background details on the heroes.

Creating the Adventure

In terms of structure, the GM (Marcus) goes with a "set piece" format (as described in *Robin's Laws of Good Gamemastering,* p. 19). Thus, he plans a few defining scenes to be encountered sequentially, with perhaps more than one way to arrive at each.

The Plot: Example

Looking at the PCs (pp. 19-21), their roles, and their individual traits, Marcus notes a few things:

- Jax is an archer, who will want opportunities to use ranged weapon fire. He is also shy, has no sense of humor, and is struggling financially. In most social situations, he will likely stay in the background.
- Rory is a charismatic people person, with merchant skills, who will be looking for a lot of social interaction. He is also uncomfortable when *not* around other people, gluttonous around food, and gets drunk quickly.
- Beldin is a hardy warrior, who will want chances to engage enemies in melee combat. He is also honest, a light sleeper, and has a bad temper.

During character creation, the players decided that Peter's character, Rory, is the one who most wants to leave Kharston. Josh's character, Jax, is going to be with his friend, and Anne's character, Beldin, is going in order to try and keep them both safe. With the PCs in mind, Marcus thinks of a good way to get them out of town: Rory, with his merchant connections, might be able to find them all work as caravan hands or scouts.

Since this is the group's first ***GURPS*** game together, Marcus keeps things basic for the first adventure or two. He writes down his plot overview: "A merchant named Tignis requires caravan scouts, and as a favor to Rory's father (Willem), she agrees to interview the PCs for the job. Tignis has heard rumors that the nearby village of Mossenway recently discovered a large silver vein, and she wants the party to find a safe way from Kharston to Mossenway so she can establish a trade route. If they choose to not accept Tignis' job, or blow the interview, they may instead hire on as guards for a caravan heading in the opposite direction, along the established route to Bluebay; or simply pick a direction and go."

The NPCs: Example

Marcus lists all the major NPCs, along with as much detail as they are likely to need. The completed list is presented here, though in reality, it would grow as Marcus creates encounters in the next step.

Willem

Rory's father, a well-respected merchant in Kharston who specializes in spices and imported foods. Willem is a large man, loud and jovial, with long gray hair tightly wound in braids. He is worried about Rory and his friends leaving town, but agrees to help them find work so his son can become his own man.

Merchant Tignis

Another merchant in Kharston, specializing in precious metals and jewelry. She is a tall, thin woman in her 40s, and very shrewd in her dealings (IQ 12, Merchant-14). Recently, Tignis received word of a silver mine being established in the backwater town of Mossenway, about a week's journey to the north. As a favor to Willem, she agrees to interview Rory and the other PCs for the job of finding safe passage there.

Bandit Thugs

These thugs work for Fiselli. Though he commands a few dozen in total, they generally appear in smaller groups of two or three. They have various physical descriptions, typically disheveled and unkempt. At 0 HP, they are automatically out of any fight. They mostly use All-Out Attack.

ST 11; **DX** 11; **IQ** 10; **HT** 11.
Damage 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11; Will 10; Per 10; FP 11.
Basic Speed 5.50; Basic Move 5; Dodge 8; Parry 9.

Disadvantages: Duty (Fiselli's bandit group).
Skills: Brawling-12; Knife-12; Shortsword-12.
Equipment: Shortsword (1d-1 imp/1d+1 cut); cloth armor (torso, arms; DR 1, flexible); boots (feet; DR 2, flexible).

Bandit Lieutenant Kalee

Fiselli's lieutenant. She has short-cropped black hair, tanned skin, and lots of scars. Kalee will generally not back down from a fight unless directly ordered to by Fiselli, or she has no chance of winning. As an experienced fighter, she will use any combat option a PC can except for extra effort.

ST 13; **DX** 11; **IQ** 10; **HT** 12.
Damage 1d/2d-1; BL 34 lbs.; HP 13; Will 10; Per 10; FP 12.
Basic Speed 5.75; Basic Move 5; Dodge 9*; Parry 11*.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; High Pain Threshold; Luck.
Disadvantages: Duty (Fiselli's bandit group); Sense of Duty (Fiselli).
Skills: Brawling-14; Broadsword-15; Knife-14.
Equipment: Thrusting broadsword (1d+2 imp/2d cut); leather armor (torso, groin; DR 2); heavy leather sleeves (arms; DR 2); pot-helm (skull; DR 4); boots (feet; DR 2, flexible).

* Includes +1 from Combat Reflexes.

Bandit Leader Fiselli

Leader of the woodlands bandits. Has tanned skin and shoulder-length black hair. Likes to put on airs of civility, but is actually quite base and cutthroat (though clever). Can use any combat option a PC can except for extra effort, but frequently targets the arm (at the usual -2 to hit).

ST 12; **DX** 12; **IQ** 13; **HT** 12.
Damage 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12; Will 10; Per 10; FP 12.
Basic Speed 6.00; Basic Move 6; Dodge 9; Parry 10.

Disadvantages: Greed.
Skills: Broadsword-14; Karate-14; Knife-12; Leadership-12.
Equipment: Thrusting broadsword (1d+1 imp/1d+3 cut); leather armor (torso, groin; DR 2); heavy leather sleeves (arms; DR 2); boots (feet; DR 2, flexible).

Bryce

Bryce is the farmer in Mossenway who originally discovered the large silver vein there, in a deep crevasse on his farmland. He is a simple man, with a generous heart, but not foolish. Bryce plans to use the silver-mine profits to improve Mossenway for everyone. He is tall and thin, with a very plain face and an unusually engaging smile.

Combat Balance

For combat balance, Marcus looks at the PCs' sheets to estimate the challenges they should face. He knows the bandits will attack at night, so he uses Jax's melee weapon for reference instead of his bow, as he may be unable to fire on the enemies before they're in sword range.

Assuming each die rolled for damage averages 3.5, and using each PC's most likely attack, Marcus gets the following numbers for the party's average damage:

Beldin: Broadsword = 2d+1 cut = 8 points of cutting damage.
Jax: Shortsword = 1d+2 cut = 5.5 points of cutting damage.
Rory: Shortsword = 1d+1 cut = 4.5 points of cutting damage.
Party Average: (8 + 5.5 + 4.5)/3 = 6 points of cutting damage.

The bandits only have a DR of 1, and Kalee and Fiselli have a DR of 2; the party's average when they hit is 6 points of cutting damage, so the party has an excellent chance of inflicting injury. The bandit averages are:

Thugs: Shortsword = 1d+1 cut = 4.5 points of cutting damage per thug.
Kalee: Thrusting broadsword = 2d cut = 7 points of cutting damage.
Fiselli: Thrusting broadsword = 1d+3 cut = 6.5 points of cutting damage.

The thugs do less average damage than the party's average, but both Kalee and Fiselli do a bit more. Against the party's DR of 2 (Beldin, Rory) and 1 (Jax), that could mean some serious wounds. The fact that the thugs automatically drop out of the fight at 0 HP, and do All-Out Attacks (allowing them no defense), should mean they'll be out of action quickly though. Marcus is satisfied these enemies will be challenging, especially Kalee, but not impossible (even more so because once the thugs start dropping, Fiselli and the others may just decide to break off and run away).

Fun Trumps Everything

The most important rule of creating encounters – and really of RPGs in general – is that fun trumps everything. Fun is the whole point, the reason we play! Planning encounters doesn't need to be about much more than finding out what the players like, and giving it to them in new and varied ways.

Encounters and Scenes: Example

Marcus envisions how the flow of events might unfold, and from there establishes five or six scenes to guide them through. Naturally, the PCs need to begin somewhere, and Marcus decides the job interview with Tignis works for that. From there, they'll set out for Mossenway, about a week's travel to the north, so there will be time for some general survival and wilderness challenges. A few days before reaching Mossenway, the party will encounter a small group of bandit "toll collectors." They may be able to avoid a fight there, but the bandits will follow them and attack the following night. Soon after, they'll reach Mossenway.

Applying for a Job

The first scene takes place in the back room of Tignis' shop in Kharston, where the PCs have agreed to meet for a job interview. Tignis is neutral to the idea of hiring them – she doesn't really care who goes, as long as they can find a safe route to Mossenway and return. Barring catastrophic social errors, they should get the job. (During the interview, remember Beldin's Honesty and Bad Temper, and Jax's Shyness and No Sense of Humor.)

Tignis offers to pay them each $250 upon their return, providing they can recount their trip clearly enough for her caravan master to follow their directions. This is a lowball offer for two weeks' work (see p. B517 for typical monthly pay), and a little haggling might get her up to a fairer $350 per scout. If they also return with a decent map, she'll add a bonus of $50 each. (Note: Cartography skill defaults to IQ-5.)

If they do not get the job, Willem asks Tignis to reconsider, as a favor to him. Tignis will hesitantly hire them at that point, but at an absolute cap of $200 each (though the map bonus remains intact).

She expects them to leave at sunrise the following morning, and provides four riding horses, minimal camping gear, trail rations, and water for a week's travel. She also gives Rory a small pouch containing $50 in coins, to be spent in Mossenway for food and water for the return trip.

Across the Wilderness

Mossenway is a small farming village about seven days' ride from Kharston, and there is no beaten path to follow through the lightly wooded wilderness. The first four days of the trip are largely uneventful, and the players can take their time exploring and roleplaying their heroes. Jax may come across a hare or game bird within bow range, if he wants to try supplementing the trail rations with fresh meat.

Some of the things they might see are a herd of deer, a gray she-wolf and her pup, a lake covered by bright green fronds, a lone farmer riding a small mule-driven cart of grain back toward Kharston, rain showers, and an enormous tree alone in a clearing that vaguely seems to have a human face on its trunk (there's nothing magical about it; it just happens to look like a face).

At the end of each day, Peter rolls against Rory's Survival (Woodlands) skill of 12, as described on p. B223, to avoid having the party take 2d-4 points of injury from the day's travel. If attempting to make a map as they ride, that Cartography roll should be made at this time, too.

Bandit Toll Road

Just after noon on the fifth day of travel, the party comes upon a faint trail cleared through a particularly dense area of woods – it leads east (two days' travel to the small village of Hemmel) and north (toward Mossenway). Following the trail allows them to move much faster. If they do so, after a few hours, they will see a group of two men and a woman on the trail ahead, sitting on the ground around a small keg (and if they don't take the trail, they may still encounter them – see *The Illusion of Freedom*, p. 26). Two horses graze near them. All are visibly armed with swords, and the woman wears leather armor (torso, arms), and a metal pot-helm (this is Kalee, the lieutenant). The other two wear cloth armor on their torsos and arms (bandit thugs).

These three are local bandits who have set up on this trail recently, extorting a "toll" of $10 from each person who wishes to pass. Their victims have so far been only local farmers and unescorted merchants, all of whom have reluctantly paid. It's likely the party can talk their way through without payment or confrontation, especially as they are armed and armored. If pushed too far, though, the bandits *will* attack – the two thugs will attempt to flee if the fight isn't going their way, but Kalee will go down swinging.

If there is no combat, Kalee takes one horse to inform the bandit leader, Fiselli, about the party as a possible target for robbing. She orders the other two bandits to follow the party on the second horse, and to report with the location of where they camp for the night. With neither Stealth nor Tracking, the bandit thugs will be forced to use defaults – when following from afar, their default Tracking (Per-5) vs. the PCs' default Tracking (if the PCs are even attempting to cover their tracks); when closer, their default Stealth (DX-5) vs. the PCs' Per. This makes it likely they will be seen, illustrating why it can be important to give NPCs a few noncombat skills (which Marcus can do at any time, if he wants them to have a better chance of staying undiscovered).

Camp and Bandit Attack

Should the party make camp that night without posting a watch, Marcus will roll against Rory's IQ, due to his Common Sense advantage (p. B43). He makes the roll instead of Peter so that, in the case of failure, the players won't wonder what the roll was for. On a success, he suggests to Peter that posting a watch might be a good idea in an area where they know bandits are active.

If the party defeated the bandits at the toll road earlier in the day, then Fiselli and three thugs, searching for those responsible, will discover their camp. In case the party didn't fight at the toll road, but were later followed, then Fiselli, Kalee, and the two thugs who followed them are the attackers.

Whichever the case, just after midnight, four bandits attack the PCs as they sleep. Someone on watch has a chance to make a Quick Contest of his Per vs. the bandits' default Stealth (DX-5).

If the watcher succeeds, he sees or hears the bandits just before they attack, and he can yell a warning. Otherwise, the party suffers total surprise, as explained on p. B393 (except for Beldin, who only suffers partial surprise because of his Combat Reflexes advantage).

With some decent light from the moon, the darkness penalty in the camp is -4. A campfire left burning could reduce this value to -2 or even 0 (depending on how big the fire is).

If the party loses the fight, the bandits will take everything of value they own, including the horses, leaving them to walk the rest of the way to Mossenway with no food or water (it takes two or three days to get there). Rory's nightly Survival (Woodlands) skill roll will be at -5 due to having no equipment (see *Equipment Modifiers*, p. B345).

Should the party win the fight, they need to decide what to do with the surviving bandits: Take them to Mossenway as prisoners, let them go, murder them, etc. Only Kalee will fight to the death – the others flee or surrender if the tide of the fight turns against them.

Trapped Wolf

Depending on how things go with the bandits, the party may be up for another encounter before reaching Mossenway. As they travel on the morning of the sixth day, they hear a wolf howling in distress from somewhere off the trail. If they investigate, they find a gray she-wolf struggling to free herself from a thick rope trap ensnaring her front leg. Some distance away, a pup looks on skittishly.

If they free the wolf, which snaps at them even as they try to do so, the injured wolf and her pup run away. On their journey back to Kharston, they may catch glimpses of the wolf and pup following them. (Marcus has no concrete plans for this leading anywhere, but it's possible it could become a minor story hook if the PCs are interested in it – maybe the wolves can be tamed, maybe they are shapeshifters, etc.)

Reaching Mossenway

Barring any long delays, Rory, Jax, and Beldin should arrive in Mossenway sometime late on the seventh day or early on the eighth day (depending on whether the bandits stole their horses). It's a small village, with just about 100 residents, but evidence of their newly discovered silver mine is apparent – new wooden huts being constructed, wagons full of tools and tackle, the smith and his apprentices working feverishly to make tools, etc.

The townspeople are a bit wary of strangers, but if the PCs reveal they are from Kharston and seeking to establish a trade route, suspicion turns to interest. The owner and discoverer of the new mine is a local named Bryce, a farmer who stumbled upon the silver vein by accident. He is sharing the profits from the mine with the whole town, who in turn are all pitching in to help get things established and running smoothly.

The townsfolk offer the PCs a small hut in which to spend the night, and supply them with food, water, and gear (if necessary) for the journey home. It's difficult to carry that many supplies if walking, but if they stick to the essentials, they can make it.

The Trip Home

Unless the players seem eager for their heroes to have more adventures before returning to Kharston for their rewards, the trip back is largely uneventful. As long as the party has survival gear, there are no more penalties to the daily Survival skill roll. Some of the possible encounters on the way home are the gray wolf and her pup, more bandits, a wandering minstrel walking to Mossenway from Hemmel, the remains of a deer ripped to pieces by something, and a night with dangerously cold temperatures.

Maps

The only map Marcus prepares beforehand is a simple sketch of the area where the party camps on the night of the bandit attack, for when the combat occurs. Other possible maps are the villages of Kharston and Mossenway, and the overland route required to travel between them. In the future, Marcus may create these maps, but for the first adventure, he doesn't think they'll be needed.

Possible Outcomes: Example

Marcus prepares notes for the most likely outcomes to occur once the heroes complete the adventure.

Party Finds a New Trade Route

If the PCs make it all the way to Mossenway, then all the way back to Kharston, Tignis pays them the agreed-upon amount. The saddle horses she loaned to them are worth $1,200 each, so if the bandits stole them she will be upset – upset enough to arrange for the local militia to go and seek out these bandits, and to offer the PCs $300 each to lead the hunt.

Depending on how well they succeeded, the PCs may also earn Reputation +1 (Reliable; Kharston merchants) [1], for being dependable. This could lead to more jobs (and more adventures).

In addition to individual character points awarded for roleplaying, one point each is awarded for successfully blazing a new trade route.

Party Doesn't Find a New Trade Route

If the PCs do not make it to Mossenway (because they somehow got lost, or turned back after the bandits attacked, etc.), Tignis pays them nothing. If they created at least a partial map of how far they traveled, she may let them keep the $50 in the pouch – otherwise, she demands that back as well.

Beyond not making any money, the party earns Reputation -1 (Unreliable; Kharston merchants) [-1], for being unreliable. This makes it harder to find future work in Kharston.

No bonus points are awarded if the PCs fail to reach Mossenway, though the usual points for good roleplaying are still given.

Party Refuses the Job

If the PCs refuse the job entirely, the sequence of encounters in this first adventure won't occur as written. There are other jobs in Kharston they may choose instead, including one as guards for a caravan to Bluebay. That caravan will also encounter trouble with bandits (whose stats are already present in the NPC roster).

Chapter Five

Running the Adventure

The scope and feel of the game have been established. The characters have been created and reviewed. The initial adventure has been designed. After all of the preparation, game day is finally here. It's show time!

For an example of the tips presented in this chapter, see Chapter 7.

Important Resources for Running the Adventure

Many of the same resources already mentioned continue to have excellent advice when it comes time to run the game.

The *Basic Set*

Read over pp. B490-499 (*Starting a Game Session*, *Running the Game*, and *Ending a Play Session*) a few times. Lots of extremely useful information about conducting adventures is packed into those pages!

> *If your group is having a good time, you have no problems in need of fixing. Whatever you do, don't disrupt your game by trying to shoehorn in techniques or concepts, from this book or anywhere else, in order to GM "properly" or "correctly."*
>
> *– Robin D. Laws,*
> ***Robin's Laws of Good Gamemastering***

Other Books

These two books continue to provide excellent GM guidance for running the game.

***GURPS** for Dummies:* Advice on acting as the GM during the actual adventure is in *Playing the GM* (pp. 209-232).

Robin's Laws of Good Gamemastering: The sections on pp. 22-33 end the book with sound advice for any GM, especially for keeping players interested and engaged as the adventure unfolds.

Other Resources

A few other resources are incredibly useful during play, making the GM's job much easier.

GM Control Sheet: This form (p. B568) provides an organized place to record the relevant information about *all* of the PCs. It lets you have all the party attributes, reaction modifiers, skills, armor, weapons, and whatever else you need, all on a single sheet. List the PCs in order of the turn sequence (p. B363) to streamline further (and if the players don't mind sitting in that order around the table, even better).

GURPS GM's Screen: It's difficult to overstate just how useful the ***GURPS GM's Screen*** is. Its six panels contain all the most important charts and tables likely to come up during game play: critical hits and misses, Fright Checks, skill modifiers, combat modifiers, hit locations, size and speed/range modifiers, maneuvers, effects of HP and FP loss, etc. As if that wasn't enough, it's also bundled with variant character sheets, copies of the NPC Record Cards, GM Control Sheet, Campaign Planning Form, and more. A truly great tool.

GURPS Combat Cards**:* These cards list information and stats for each of the ***Basic Set maneuvers (but not the optional maneuvers from ***Martial Arts***) on its own separate card. This allows players to simply choose their maneuver from the deck each turn without looking up anything in the rulebook. Available for free from **warehouse23.com**.

The Role of the GM

For someone new to acting as the GM, it can seem a daunting task. Certainly, more work is involved than simply playing, but the rewards are great: The excitement of players enjoying an encounter you've created. Tales told for months, even years, after the game, as folks reminisce about their favorite moments. The simple pleasure of knowing you've created something special and fun for a few hours.

GURPS is designed around there being a GM in the loop, exercising judgment. It isn't a set of PvP or computer-game rules. It's a tool kit for GMs. We design assuming that there *will* be a GM, the GM *will* fudge, and the players *will* live with it.

Before the Session

You've arrived at the gaming area, or are already there as the players begin to arrive, and there's still some time before the get-together begins.

Be Prepared: Unpack everything, and double-check to be sure it's all there: your adventure and notes, copies of the character sheets, books, maps, dice, paper, pencils, snacks, drinks – *everything*. The fewer times you need to get up or rummage around for something, the smoother the game will flow. If you haven't already, fill in a GM Control Sheet.

Socialize: This might seem obvious, but people sometimes get so focused on the adventure itself they forget they're there to have fun! Once everything is set and ready to go, take some time to just chat and socialize. This could even help everyone stay focused once the session starts (and many groups enjoy frequent out-of-character jokes and banter as part of the game).

Recap: If this isn't the group's first adventure, give a quick recap of what occurred in previous sessions. A lot of time can pass between opportunities to game. Without occasional recaps of prior adventures, important clues and events get forgotten.

Answer Questions: Ask if there are any last minute questions – about the characters, awarded points, rules, previous events, or whatever.

Relax and Have Fun: Most importantly – take a deep breath and relax. You've spent a lot of time and energy to get to this point, so enjoy it!

During the Session

At its simplest, the GM gets the ball rolling with a description of what's happening in the game world. The players then reply with how their PCs are reacting, which prompts another GM reply, and some time later, after this pattern resolves itself an untold number of times, the adventure draws to a close until next time. The trick is to make all of those little interactions add up to a unique, exciting, entertaining whole.

Start With Some Action

Exactly how this part of the adventure begins depends on how the last part ended. If it's the commencement of a new campaign, the GM can start with whatever he likes. Often it's a good idea to thrust the adventurers right in the thick of things: a car chase, running across a swaying rope bridge, being caught in a burning building, etc. Engage the players right away, and draw them into a hair-raising situation that gets their pulses going. There's still plenty of time for character conversation once everyone is safe.

Pay Attention to the Players

It's crucial that you give players your undivided attention. For starters, it's simply polite to focus on someone when they have the floor. If you respect the players while they are speaking, they'll hopefully do the same for you.

More importantly, player conversation is a gold mine of ideas for you to plunder and use, as mentioned in *Following the Players' Lead* (p. 25). Many times, the players will come up with NPC motivations, story ideas, and plot twists that are even better than those you planned. Using those ideas improves the game for everyone, and the players are free to assume that they simply deduced what was coming next.

Let the Players Have Fun

Occasionally, in the GM's zeal to get the story rolling, he doesn't allow the players to take actions that don't directly or immediately advance the plot. However, players sometimes enjoy just spending time interacting as their adventurers with other party members or NPCs. This isn't a red flag signaling that the game is boring! On the contrary, it means the game world and its people are immersive enough to savor as ends themselves, and not just as a means to the plot.

In the example adventure from the previous chapter, a few times occur where the heroes aren't doing much more than traveling. If the players want to roleplay some of those stretches, having conversations around the campfire or discussing their plans as they ride along the trail, the GM should not feel compelled to hurry them along.

Despite running high-powered games where the players need report folders to hold their character sheets, I enjoy sessions where those character sheets sit to one side, the dice stay bagged, and the entire night consists of the players acting out their PCs' lives as they see fit while I play the NPCs' parts. Events are settled by the group agreeing to a dramatic consensus without any need to formalize or explicitly discuss it, because we're a group of friends cooperating to tell a cool story. We still need rules, of course, because we also enjoy high-action sessions where we roll lots of dice. "Rules-light, acting-heavy for social; save crunch for action" has shaken out as the ideal situation for every gaming group I've had since the 1970s.

Always Have an Encounter Ready

Try to always have at least one encounter to bring out at any time. There's a difference between the players taking time to enjoy themselves as their adventurers and the players floundering around, looking for something to do. Any time the pace of the game seems like it's flagging, and the players are losing interest, quickly have something happen to engage the protagonists.

This doesn't have to be combat, or even action – just something that occurs that they can explore or interact with. In the adventure outlined in Chapter 4, the "Trapped Wolf" encounter is an example of this. The PCs could plausibly come across that wolf at any point along their journey, either on the way to Mossenway or on the way back home, and it gives them something to do before getting back to the main plot.

Include Everyone

One of the GM's many challenges is to make sure every player's character has an equal chance for time in the spotlight. Although it's awkward to actually take turns, rotating from Player A, to B, to C, then back to A, try to provide plenty of opportunities and adventure hooks for *all* the participants, and to be aware of any imbalances.

Tailor to the Adventurers

Everything the GM needs to run exciting adventures that the players will love is already on their character sheets. Simply put, players spend points on things that they like. Someone who buys his PC a ST of 16 and a Broadsword skill of 18 probably wants to cleave his way through hordes of faceless enemies – let him! A player who creates a mage wants to cast spells. A player who designs a superhero who can fly wants to fly. Sometimes, it really is as simple as just giving the players a chance to do what they want to do.

Fluidity is the key to success in unpredictable situations – and any situation where more than two free-willed people are using their imaginations and letting random-number generators play a role is *very* unpredictable. I don't think that any group should be shackled by the rules.

I have two modes myself. One mode is very fast-moving, used whenever I feel that details would get in the way of story. When GMing in this mode, I'm likely to say things like, "Gimme a Per-based Soldier roll. Made it by four? Cool, good enough!," even if the "official" solution would be IQ-based Tactics at -2. I go by feel: skill suits task, attribute fits situation, roll is made by enough to account for reasonable difficulty. Sometimes I even say things like, "You have all the right skills at good levels, so sure, it works," or, "Hey, you have a perk specifically for this – go right ahead!" Specific modifiers and often die rolls get sidelined. Mostly, I'm just looking to match the heroes' abilities to events in a plausible way.

The other mode is high-detail. I look up modifiers, consult tables, and make sure that every roll gets made. For instance, when somebody tosses a grenade, I apply all the modifiers for All-Out Attack (Determined), range, visibility, attacking an area, etc.; I determine exactly where it scatters to; I calculate concussion for each victim based on distance; I have the grenade-tosser roll for fragmentation on each victim, and for random hit location and damage for each fragment hit; and then I determine death, unconsciousness, knockdown, etc. by the books. This is *still* in the service of the story. In this case, my goal is to show how important technical precision is to the events at hand, how big a deal some otherwise quick action really is, or – in cases like that grenade example – how tense and/or deadly things are.

I don't use one or the other mode exclusively in a given campaign, though. I switch freely as the situation dictates. My goal is to use whichever mode does the story more justice at that moment in time.

Try New Things

There are as many ways to be a GM as there are GMs, so don't be shy about trying new things. Play background music for atmosphere, make handouts for the players, use accents and different voices for NPCs, describe "segue scenes" to the players of things going on in the world that their adventurers don't know, use props (such as costume jewelry), play by candlelight, prepare food for the group similar to what the protagonists are eating. Whatever seems like it could be fun, try it!

End With a Cliffhanger

No advice can be universal for a game that supports so many different play styles, but with most groups, for most games, ending with a cliffhanger is a good idea. It ends things on a high note, with everyone interested in what's happening, and builds anticipation for the next game. The PCs don't need to actually be in danger, though that certainly works too; they just need to be on the brink of resolving something that will be eagerly awaited when left hanging. Opening a door to discover a mob of enemies on the other side, pushing the button on the giant machine to see what will happen, waking up handcuffed in a room with no memory of what led there – these kinds of things keep players looking forward to the next game.

If the session is one in which the PCs completed an adventure, and are going to have some "downtime" before the next, ending with a cliffhanger is *not* recommended. The PCs need a little time to recuperate and possibly gain the benefits of a Time Use Sheet (p. B569).

After the Session

After the final scene, a few additional activities can wrap up the session.

Give Out Rewards

This is the time to dish out the rewards, based on the adventurers' actions and how successfully they advanced the story. If a PC helped an important NPC, he might gain a new Contact advantage, or even an Ally, or be given a higher Status or Reputation. More material rewards – money, gold, gems, new equipment, titles, land, vehicles, etc. – are always welcome. Whatever good things could plausibly arise from someone's actions in the context of the story, award them here.

This is also the time for bonus character points. Two or three points per session are average, based on each player's ability to roleplay his adventurer well and advance the story. Even more can be awarded if this session was the culmination of a long or important arc.

Ask for Feedback and Suggestions

The best way to make a good game better is to listen to what your players have to say after each game. Ask what they liked and didn't like, what could have been better, what they want to see more of, what were their most favorite and least favorite parts . . . anything you can think of.

Whether this feedback is quantified ("How would you rate tonight's session on a scale of 1-10?"), or arrived at through conversation ("Has it been too long since the group had any combat?"), listen to it all honestly and with an open mind. Incorporate anything that might improve the campaign.

Time Use Sheet

The optional Time Use Sheet (p. B569) is explained fully on p. B499. If the next game session is going to pick up right where the current one ended, or within just a few hours or days, a Time Use Sheet won't apply. However, if the time passing for the PCs is going to be measured in weeks or longer, filling out a Time Use Sheet can help them earn points toward a Language, Cultural Familiarity, job-related skills, or any skill they choose to study.

Try to Improve

This is related to asking for feedback. Being a GM is like any other creative endeavor – with practice, with experience, comes improvement. Don't rest on the laurels of past games, or fall into a predictable rut. Always try to make the next session just a little better.

Record the Game Events

Keeping a current record of the campaign can help everyone remember NPC names, important events, plot developments, etc. Try to update these notes soon after the game, while memories are still fresh. Many GMs share these summaries with the players via email, wiki, etc.

RUNNING THE CAMPAIGN

As related encounters make an adventure, so do related adventures make a campaign. A campaign can last for months, even years, of real time, and cover even more time in the game world. Much of the advice already given for adventures applies to campaigns as well, just on a larger scale.

Think Big

Take advantage of the broader scope of a campaign by dreaming up truly epic challenges for your players. "Earn enough credits to travel to the next starport" is a goal for a few adventures. Earning enough to *buy* a planet-hopping starship is probably grand enough for a campaign goal – and earning enough for a fleet of interstellar traders definitely is!

The example adventure from Chapter 4 could be the first step on a long road for the PCs. Maybe the bandits they encounter are just the tiniest part of a vast network, run by a powerful count who becomes the PCs' enemy over the course of dozens of adventures. Perhaps they'll find themselves in the middle of an Infinity Patrol mission, and end up traveling to other worlds! There are no limits.

Follow the Flow

The adventures that make up a campaign should flow naturally into one another, as the encounters in an adventure do. When creating the next adventure, use loose ends from the previous one as the seeds. If the PCs foil a bank robbery, any robbers not captured might want revenge. If they find a new trade route, others may want to hire them as scouts. If they slay a dragon and rescue a princess, they may be rewarded with titles and land. Whenever an adventure ends, brainstorm various ways the story could continue from there, and pick the one that sounds the most fun. Thwarted plans, defeated villains, and discovered schemes all provide hooks for further developing the larger story.

Occasionally Ignore the Flow

The game world will seem much more vibrant and alive if the players don't always feel like the universe revolves around their group. Other important people in the setting should have their own agendas, and pursue them whether it involves the PCs or not. Not every adventure needs to revolve around the campaign goals.

Expect Changes

No matter what ideas you start with, be prepared to modify them as the campaign unfolds. You may envision a series of adventures that have the protagonists exploring long-lost cities; rescuing ancient artifacts from obscurity, ruin, and profiteers; and eventually leading them to the mythical city of Atlantis. The players, however, may enjoy being black-market artifact poachers, trying to stay one step ahead of the authorities and selling the items they find. The campaign can still culminate with the discovery of Atlantis, but it will be as "the final great score" instead of "the greatest archaeological find of the century."

As always, discussing expectations and what everyone wants out of the campaign *before* starting goes a long way toward reducing miscommunication and disappointment.

Vary the Downtime

The in-game time between *encounters* in an adventure is usually measured in hours or days. The time between *adventures* can be measured in weeks, months, even years or longer! A campaign's scope can be truly epic. Maybe you want to follow a group of heros from their humble beginnings, through the height of their careers, and well into their golden years for one last adventure. The campaign could begin with the PCs as young amateurs for a few adventures, then skip ahead by 10 years, with them receiving points to improve their characters. After a number of adventures as seasoned veterans, another 10 or 20 years pass by, followed by more point spending, and even more adventures.

Supernatural and superhuman protagonists can extend a campaign's scope even more. A clan of PC vampires who awaken and feed, then return to extended "hibernation," could cover centuries of in-game time in just a few adventures. The adventurers can change as well, but share similar circumstances across the years, such as adventures following a group of detectives at an agency's founding in the Old West, then a different group working for the same agency in the modern day, and finally a third group in the future, spearheading the agency's first lunar contract.

Chapter Six
Combat

Combat is a fundamental part of most RPGs, challenging and thrilling players with the threat of PC injury or even death. The ***GURPS*** combat rules are flexible, consistent, and *extremely* customizable! Being well-versed in them keeps things humming along once trouble erupts.

Combat rules receive a lot of attention because, in most games, they come up much more frequently than all other rules, and because the effects of combat are both immediate and possibly fatal, for PCs. Rare is the failed Accounting skill roll that costs someone his life; not so for a failed Dodge or HT roll.

Although most of this advice is useful for players seeking to expand their grasp of martial tactics, its main target remains the GM: to help him choose options that match the combat system to his group's style of play, to take a detailed look at the many ways NPC fighters can be a challenge to the PC party, and to give him tools for adjusting enemy effectiveness, both up and down, as battles play out.

One of Many Tools

It shouldn't be assumed that combat is anything more than just one of many equal tools because it gets its own chapter, or that all ***GURPS*** games focus on violence and fighting! It's absolutely possible to use ***GURPS*** for entire campaigns that never have a single fight, relying only on the rules for activities like skill application and social interaction. That would be an unusual campaign for the hobby as a whole, regardless of rules system, but if it describes your campaign, you can skip this chapter. You should also check out ***Social Engineering!***

Customizing Combat

The ***GURPS*** combat rules can be tweaked in a myriad of ways, from extremely rules-light all the way up to options for the tiniest details. The system uses a modular design, though, so you can easily add options you want while ignoring those you don't.

Lethality

The most basic question is, "How deadly should combat be?" Not using certain options makes it much easier for PCs to survive; using others makes combat more lethal.

Accumulated Wounds and Last Wounds (p. B420): These options adjust the rules for crippling limbs and extremities. Accumulated wounds make it easier to cripple these locations by tracking the *total* damage done (instead of only damage done in a single blow). Last wounds let someone wounded below 1/3 HP effectively ignore all further hits to the limbs or extremities, unless they are especially telling.

Bleeding (p. B420): Increases lethality by allowing wounds to continue bleeding and causing injury (straight HP loss, with no damage type), even after a fight is over (unless the bleeder is successfully treated with First Aid). This isn't very cinematic, but it makes the effects of violence even more dangerous for realistic games. It's also good justification for those weak NPCs who collapse to the ground at 0 HP and die after the battle. See *Severe Bleeding* (***Martial Arts,*** p. 138) for even more pronounced effects.

I do tend to assume, when writing ***GURPS*** rules, that most deaths from sharp and pointy things are either of the "5 HP injury, or enough to get -1 to the HT roll for bleeding, followed by bleeding to death" variety or the "10 HP injury, or enough to pass out and get -2 to the HT roll for bleeding, followed by bleeding to death quickly" type. I regard random street and prison stabbings that take the victim from full HP to -HP in one shot as ultra-cinematic. Most stabbing deaths = bleeding to death, possibly from internal bleeding, possibly hours after the injury occurred.

Dying Actions (p. B423): If an important character dies, the GM can allow him one final action before he collapses. Often, this is to make one last attack on his killer!

Mortal Wounds (p. B423): If someone makes a HT roll to avoid death and misses by 1 or 2, he suffers a mortal wound instead of dying outright. Though incapacitated and still in danger of dying, there's at least a *chance* he'll live. This situation gives you an opportunity to save an important villain left for dead, or a PC who needs a break.

Death from real-life combat injuries is generally a consequence of blood loss minutes to hours after injury, organ failure hours to days after injury, or infection days to weeks after injury. The rules for this are Bleeding, Mortal Wounds, and Infection, respectively. Remember that ***GURPS*** combat is second-by-second, not minute-by-minute, and that the effects considered are only those that matter *now* – not the ones that *might* happen afterward. A mortal blow can still leave the fighter able to fight; he just dies later.

Permanence of Death: An important factor in the discussion of combat lethality is how permanent death is in the setting. For magical realms where heroes can be easily resurrected, or futuristic settings where incredible technology can return the dead to life, the threat of dying in battle loses some of its sting. However, when death means creating a new adventurer, the stakes are higher.

Unconsciousness (p. B423): There are many ways to be rendered unconscious, things like failing the immediate HT roll for going below 0 HP, some critical hits, failing a knockdown roll by 5 or more, being at or below -1×FP, etc. Unconsciousness is a valuable tool for capturing the party alive, or defeating them without killing them.

Selecting Options

With such a variety of options to choose from, new GMs often ask which they should use. Below are some very concrete groupings, from few to many. Nonetheless, just because every option *can* be used doesn't necessarily mean it *should* be.

I put all of those rules in there so that 1,000 different gaming groups could run 1,000 different, custom-fitted rules-light versions of ***GURPS.*** I didn't really imagine that there would be people who would want to turn on *all* of the switches. I saw my work as setting out a really complete buffet. But I guess some people just have to have some of everything, even if 90% of it doesn't taste good together and they only need 10% of the calories.

Speed of Play vs. Realism

The spectrum along which the combat options run has "fewest options, fastest play, least detail" on one end, and "most options, slowest play, greatest detail" on the other. The fewer options used, the quicker resolution will be – but as more are added, scenes become filled with more detail.

Deciding how to categorize these rules is very subjective. Still, the lists can guide the new GM toward full rules familiarity; they offer a starting point for customization at "Fewest Options . . ." and provide a path to follow. (Each list expands the suggested rules of the previous one.)

Once you find a category that fits your group, and the players are happy with the way combat works, there's no reason to continue adding options. These categories certainly aren't "all or nothing" either; even after finding the point where your group is most comfortable, you could pick one or two interesting rules from the next category up and give them a try.

Fewest Options, Fastest Play, Least Detail

This is the minimum needed to run any kind of combat. There's not a lot of detail, but turns go extremely quickly, and you can embellish combat descriptions with whatever fits the scene.

Maneuvers (pp. B363-366) – all but Change Posture, Evaluate, and Feint.

Movement (pp. B367-368) is abstract, with no movement points.

Hit Location (p. B369) defaults to torso.

Attacking (p. B369) follows the usual "attack, defense, damage" series of rolls.

Unarmed Combat (p. B370) – striking and grabbing only.

Dodging, Blocking, and *Parrying* (pp. B374-377) – only one parry and one block per turn.

Damage and Injury (pp. B377-381), excluding wounding modifiers, shock, major wounds, and stunning.

Critical Hits and Misses (pp. B381-382).

Dying Actions (p. B423).

GURPS Martial Arts

A lot of combat rules in the ***Basic Set*** were deliberately left vague on the grounds of "it works well enough for those who don't want nit-picking detail in their games." We assumed that readers who cared about fine details would get ***Martial Arts*** when it came out.

All the expanded and new rules in ***Martial Arts*** easily double the size of the core combat system! If you're new enough to the game to still be feeling around the ***Basic Set,*** the extras found in ***Martial Arts*** will likely be a bit overwhelming. Let the group get a solid grasp of how combat plays out with the core rules before incorporating new options from ***Martial Arts.***

Light and Quick

Although previously sacrificed for speed (particularly wounding modifiers), including these basic options can maintain a quick pace while increasing combat possibilities.

Maneuvers (pp. B363-366), including Change Posture, Evaluate, and Feint.

Unarmed Combat (p. B370-372), including grappling, slam, and shove.

Rapid Fire (pp. B373-374).

Wounding Modifiers and Injury (p. B379).

Shock (p. B419).

Size and Speed/Range Table (p. B550) for ranged attacks.

Balanced

These options bring the game to a good balance between detail and speed. Many of these rules cover special cases not likely to come up frequently. Options included from ***Martial Arts*** are generally those not requiring additional die rolls.

Extra Effort in Combat (p. B357) – Flurry of Blows, Feverish Defense, and Mighty Blows.

Deceptive Attack (pp. B369-370).

Rapid Strike (p. B370).

Acrobatic Dodge and *Sacrificial Dodge* (p. B375).

Parrying Heavy Weapons (p. B376).

Retreat, Dodge and Drop, Sacrificial Dodge and Drop, and *Diving for Cover* (p. B377).

Flexible Armor and Blunt Trauma (p. B379).

Knockback (p. B378).

Hurting Yourself (p. B379) when attacking unarmed.

Hexes (pp. B384-385) instead of abstract movement.

Wild Swings (pp. B388-389).
Reach of a Weapon (p. B388).
Close Combat (pp. B391-392).
Surprise Attacks and Initiative (p. B393).
Visibility (p. B394).
Hit Location (pp. B398-400).
Striking at Weapons (pp. B400-401).
Special Melee Weapon Rules (pp. B404-406) – cloaks, flails, stuck picks, shield bash, shield rush, etc.
Shotguns and Multiple Projectiles (p. B409).
Special Ranged Weapons (pp. B410-411) – bolas, flaming arrows, hand grenades, etc.
Dual-Weapon Attacks (p. B417).
Major Wounds (p. B420).
Knockdown and Stunning (p. B420).
Crippling Injury (pp. B420-423).
Postures (p. B551), along with attack and defense modifiers.

From ***Martial Arts:***

All-Out Attack (Long) (pp. 97-98).
Change Posture (p. 98) – diving forward, falling backward, and acrobatic stand.
Committed Attack and *Defensive Attack* (pp. 99-100).
Feint (p. 100) – specifically, resisting feints with the best Melee Weapon or unarmed combat skill.
Who Draws First? (p. 103).
Acrobatic Movement (pp. 105-107).
Pummeling (p. 111).
Telegraphic Attack (p. 113).
Sprawling (p. 119).
Tricky Shooting (p. 121) – prediction shots and ranged feints.
Cross Parry and *Supported Parry* (p. 121).
Limiting Multiple Dodges and *Multiple Blocks* (p. 123).
Parrying with Two-Handed Weapons (p. 123).
Multiple Attacks (pp. 126-128).
Extra Effort in Combat (p. 131) – Giant Step, Great Lunge, Heroic Charge, and Rapid Recovery.
New Hit Locations (p. 137) – ear, jaw, joints, nose, spine, and veins and arteries.
Improvised Weapons (p. 224).

Most Options, Slowest Play, Greatest Detail

These further options are for "full bells and whistles," and result in the most detail and complexity at the cost of some speed. This is definitely *not* to say that using some or all of these slows combat to a crawl. Experienced GMs and players, who spend time to learn and use these rules as they do any others, will find they become second nature.

Familiarity (p. B169).
Combat techniques (pp. B230-232).
Facing (p. B385).
Movement and Facing (pp. B386-387).
Shooting Blind (p. B389).
Hitting the Wrong Target (pp. B389-390).
Overshooting and Stray Shots (p. B390).
Opportunity Fire (p. B390).
Pop-Up Attacks (p. B390).
Defending in Tactical Combat (pp. B390-391) against attacks from the side, the rear, and "runaround" attacks.
Changing Posture in Armor (p. B395).
Attack from Above, Combat at Different Levels (pp. B402-403).
Firing Upward and Downward (p. B407).
Malfunctions (p. B407).
Cover (pp. B407-408).
Overpenetration (p. B408).
Special Rules for Rapid Fire (pp. B408-410) – spraying fire, suppression fire, etc.
Optional Rules for Injury (p. B420) – bleeding, accumulated wounds, and last wounds.

From ***Martial Arts:***

Realistic Techniques and *Cinematic Techniques* (pp. 65-89).
Targeted Attacks (p. 68).
Using Your Legs (p. 79) for grappling.
Combinations (pp. 80 and 109).
Postures, Hit Locations, and Techniques (pp. 98-99).
Evaluate (p. 100).
Beats, Ruses, and *Defensive Feints* (pp. 100-101).
Quick-Readying Nearby Weapons (p. 104).
Move and Attack (p. 107).
Stop Hits (p. 108).
Defensive Grip and *Reversed Grip* (pp. 109-112).
A Matter of Inches (p. 110) for further granularity of weapon Reaches.
Shin Kicks, Shoves with Weapons, Slams with Long Weapons, Striking at Shields, and *Tip Slash* (pp. 112-113).
Close-Combat Options (pp. 114-119).
Quick-Shooting Bows and *Rapid Strike with Thrown Weapons* (pp. 119-121).
Multiple Parries (p. 122) against attacks from the side.
Restricted Dodge Against Firearms (p. 123).
Parries with Legs or Feet (p. 123).
Retreat Options (pp. 123-124) – dive, sideslip, and slip.
Harsh Realism for Unarmed Fighters (p. 124).
Riposte and *Unbalanced Parries* (pp. 124-125).
Partial Injuries and *Extreme Dismemberment* (p. 136).
Severe Bleeding and *Lasting and Permanent Injuries* (pp. 138-139).
Weapons of Quality (p. 216).

Speaking as a guy who has spent 25 years playing ***GURPS,*** 16 years working on it, and two years revising the ***GURPS Basic Set,*** I'd say that if you rate each of "fast-moving" and "realistic" from 1-10, we shot for and attained something like 6.5+6.5. I don't believe that 10+10 is possible; most games would probably have an aggregate score of 11, or dead-average, and typically break 9+2 if they favor ease of play, 5.5+5.5 if they shoot for balance, or 2+9 if they try to be reality simulators. I'm saying that ***GURPS*** shot for balance and beat the average by at least a point in each category. People make a big deal out of its realism because *most* games opt for that 9+2, and a 6.5 in realism is many orders more realistic than a 2.

My point is that the game can balance speed and realism as SJ claims, and be more realistic than most games as its fans often claim, without being as realistic as possible. There will as a result be many places where it tosses realism because it would be too expensive in its impact on playability.

Options adjust speed of play and realism.

Speeding Up Combat

Even using many options, combat can still run smoothly and efficiently as long as you prepare beforehand, outside of combat, and players try to plan what they will do once their turn comes around.

For more on speeding up the action, see *Faster Combat* on p. 126 of ***Martial Arts*** for general advice, and *Shooting Made Easy* on p. 36 of ***Action 2: Exploits*** for advice specific to firefights.

Practice and Arena Matches

The single most important factor in helping fight scenes move along quicker is simply to practice using the combat system. This doesn't have to be confined to the usual game time. The GM and players can get together at any time just to play some "arena matches."

An arena match is a game with no pretense of roleplay attached to it – simple warriors with nothing but combat skills and advantages are built on similar point totals, outfitted with armor and weapons, and turned loose in an arena of the GM's making. If you want a refresher on firearms rules, are thinking about incorporating ripostes into your game, or want to see how effective magic can be in various combat situations, then those are the kinds of characters that battle it out. Whatever area of the rules you want to explore and practice, those are the rules the arena fighters use.

Practice as a Backup Plan

These pure combat games are also good for when a player is running late or absent. Instead of postponing or playing something else, the group can practice using combat options and trying out things they'd like to see in the game without any lasting harm to their PCs.

Hex Maps and Counters

Using a hex map and counters (or cardboard or metal figures) can add a lot to the game, and things like facing and movement points assume them. Although the action of an RPG takes place in the imagination, having a physical map of the scene – along with visible representation of where everyone is positioned and how they are facing – gives the whole group a common overview of what's happening.

Theoretically, sure . . . avoiding a map streamlines certain things: You can fudge or simply ignore all the rules that invoke distance, facing, footing, etc., and of course you get to avoid the physical complexity of maps, counters, smudgy markers, and the cat stepping on Og the Ogre's head. However, all of this amounts to "simplifying the game," which isn't at all the same as making combat sharper and deadlier.

Having a map actually addresses that problem. No longer are such things as how far Mr. Defense can retreat before he must stand his ground, flanking, ganging up, and whether somebody was taken out by an obstacle or a stray shot debatable or subjective. Players and GM alike can work toward these goals in a direct, fair way. Experience tells me that when the players can *see* which ninja is Ninja #5, and gang up on him, circle him, push him toward the wall, and shove him down a flaming pit of spikes . . . well, Ninja #5 goes down faster. In essence, a map serves as both a visualization aid that helps many players make decisions and as a tool that makes it easier to use advanced options that increase the odds of a telling hit.

I realize that this seems counterintuitive to some gamers. There's a strong meme in gamer culture that "tactical" systems with maps and minis are fussy, and string out combat for longer than necessary. This is true when those options *reduce* the odds of telling hits by making it easier to retreat, run away, take cover, etc., or in games where the maneuvering is just extra steps so that you can get next to some guy, roll vs. Kill Enemy, and win. But in general, ***GURPS*** combat gets *deadlier* on a map, because a map sets harder limits on defensive options (you can't just assume a good facing or enough distance to retreat), and is necessary to take full advantage of many offensive options. Of course, the GM can just hand-wave things like "Okay, he's retreated as far as he can" or "Right, you flank him," but players are less likely to pursue those tactics if they can't visualize the field of battle.

Hex maps can be photocopied or printed from a computer, with multiple pages taped together for larger areas, but many gamers use vinyl maps with pre-printed hexes and erasable markers. Features of the battlefield can be drawn in quickly and later erased, leaving the hex map clean and ready for the next battle.

If you want to print your own maps and counters, check out ***Floor Plan 2: The Great Salt Flats*** (a set of blank hex map sheets from Steve Jackson Games) and the ***Cardboard Heroes*** line (also from Steve Jackson Games). Both of these are available at **warehouse23.com**.

Influencing Combat

There are *many* ways to boost or lower someone's combat effectiveness. Attributes, skills, and advantages play an important part, but even a weak or average combatant can tip the odds with the right maneuvers and tactics.

People who fight together are also much more effective. For examples, see the Teamwork perk (***Martial Arts,*** p. 52), *Never Go Alone* (***Gun-Fu,*** p. 12), *Spotters and Observers* (***Tactical Shooting,*** p. 27), and even *Coordinated Attacks* (***Powers,*** pp. 165-166).

The descriptions here are only a brief overview! Individual entries in the ***Basic Set*** and ***Martial Arts*** have full details, special cases, and exceptions.

Useful Combat Attributes

The two most important combat attributes are ST and DX.

ST and not DX is *the* God Score for warriors in ***GURPS.*** It determines what weapons (of any TL) you can manage without massive penalties, how deadly your low-tech weapons will be, how much armor you can wear and still move, how many hits you can take (HP = ST for most people), and when the fight finally moves to grappling, as most fights do, whether you'll be able to break free or simply be pinned and have horrible things done to you.

In my experience, most players buy up ST because they know that encumbrance will whack them otherwise. Only getting to use 80% or 60% of your Basic Move, taking -1 or -2 to Dodge, and having -1 or -2 on a bunch of adventuring skills like Climbing and Stealth generally doesn't appeal to gamers. If combat figures in the campaign, they also know that inadequate damage – whether due to being too weak to hit hard or being too weak to carry a big gun – is frustrating, and that precision can't always compensate.

Most of the more rules-aware players I know like ST 13. You get the full 1d of thrust. You're rolling 2d for swing. You have enough BL to carry light armor, shield, and weapon (at low TL), or vest, sidearm, long arm, and reloads (at high TL), and still have no encumbrance. In my last high-tech campaign, even the desk-jockey raised his ST to this level.

Moreover, survival relies a fair bit on ST. A ST 10, HT 8 character can wear 56% more armor than a ST 8, HT 10 character, which at modest Wealth translates into about DR 3-4 vs. DR 2 at low TLs. The stronger character also has +2 HP. Faced with other ST 8-10 fighters doing around 1d damage, the stronger one won't even need to roll HT most of the time. At higher TLs, most weapons kill in one shot if they pierce your armor, almost regardless of HT, so the ST to move whilst lugging trauma plates becomes vital.

Thus, while it makes little sense for a warrior to have less-than-average DX or HT, it makes almost *no* sense for him to have below-average ST. There are plenty of paths to "effective warrior," but few of them lead through the land of reduced ST. Which is as it should be . . . I can't think of a type of serious, career warrior that wasn't consistently chosen for physical power.

Scaling for High-Powered Games

The attribute score suggestions assumes a game mostly rooted in "reality," around the 150- to 200-point level, with characters similar to real-world humans (even if fighting dragons or wielding psionic abilities). The guidelines need to be scaled up for higher point totals. A ST of 14 is good for 200-point fantasy, but awful for supers where the villains routinely have ST 40 or more. A shambling zombie with DX 9-11 and DR 6 is a challenge for mundane 150-point investigators, but won't even slow down a group of 1,000-point heroes. See the appropriate genre book for suggestions on attribute levels.

If an attack comes in unexpectedly and you're really agile, you're going to be able to react regardless of why you didn't anticipate the attack. After ST, DX *owns* combat; all the other stuff just helps low-DX people compete with high-DX people.

While ST has the primary role in determining a fighter's overall combat effectiveness, DX allows for higher skill levels and improved dodges. Depending on which attributes are emphasized, different warrior types are possible. For example, with the same 90 points you could buy ST 15, DX 12 for lots of Hit Points, ability to wear heavy armor, and high damage with low-tech weapons; ST 11, DX 14 for higher skill levels, increased chances to target specific hit locations, and ability to rely on maneuvers such as Deceptive Attack; or ST 13, DX 13 for a good balance of both.

For "monster" type opponents (dragons, rocs, etc.), DX and HT should remain around average human levels, to avoid creatures that are virtually unkillable (unless, of course, they are supposed to be virtually unkillable). For humanoid opponents, attributes can just roughly mirror those of the PCs they're meant to oppose.

Big toughies can have almost any ST and HP you like, but DX is 9-11; HT is 12-13; Dodge is at most 9; and DR is 2-4 naked, perhaps going to 6 in armor. Every point you go above these averages pushes the monster further into "intentional PC-killer" territory – especially if those improvements are in multiple areas and/or come with more ST and HP. ST and HP by themselves are relatively safe, believe it or not. ST only matters *if it hits* (***GURPS*** makes it pretty easy for PCs to avoid that), and HP simply soak damage; they don't prevent it from happening.

Useful Combat Skills

To be a challenging opponent, able to defend himself and successfully overcome enemies, an individual needs at least *some* combat skills. A variety will be more effective in more situations, but even one or two skills is better than none at all.

Unarmed

Fighters completely untrained in any unarmed skill roll against DX to hit with a punch, or against DX-2 to hit with a kick (and must roll vs. DX to avoid falling if the kick misses, per p. B274). Six unarmed skills improve a combatant's chances of winning in a conflict. Each one has different specific effects; they increase damage inflicted, allow for improved attacks and defenses, or both. Additionally, there is no "off-hand" in unarmed combat. For extra-realistic options for unarmed fighters, see *Harsh Realism for Unarmed Fighters* (***Martial Arts,*** p. 124).

Boxing (p. B182): Improves punching damage, but not kicking. Allows unarmed parrying of two different attacks per turn, one with each hand, and gives an improved retreating bonus when parrying. Boxing skill is *not* affected by encumbrance.

Brawling (p. B182): Replaces DX for attacks with "natural weapons" such as teeth, claws, horns, etc., as well as a sap or blackjack. Enhances damage for all Brawling attacks, and allows unarmed parrying of two different attacks per turn, one with each hand. Though spending only 1 point in Brawling (to reach DX level) neither enhances damage nor aids parrying, it *does* permit use of techniques that have no DX default, such as Elbow Strike (p. B230) and Knee Strike (p. B232). Brawling does *not* aid skill with any kind of grappling! This is the most common unarmed skill for "fodder" NPCs.

Comparison of Unarmed Combat Skills

Effect	*Boxing*	*Brawling*	*Judo*	*Karate*	*Sumo Wrestling*	*Wrestling*
Improves punch damage	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Improves kick damage	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Improves grappling*	No	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Different attacks parried	2	2	2	2	1	1
Parry vs. kicks	-2	0	0	0	-2	0
Parry vs. non-thrusting weapons	-3	-3	0	0	-3	-3
Retreating bonus	+3	+1	+3	+3	+1	+1
Affected by encumbrance	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No

* How grappling improves depends on the skill: Judo skill can be used in place of DX for any close combat DX roll except drawing a weapon or dropping a shield, and allows throwing an opponent; Sumo Wrestling benefits grapples, slams, shoves, and takedowns; and Wrestling benefits grapples, takedowns, chokes, neck snaps, and pins.

Judo (p. B203): Used to throw opponents, improve grappling options, and reduce the chance of injury when parrying unarmed against an armed foe. Allows unarmed parrying of two different attacks per turn, one with each hand, and gives an improved retreating bonus when parrying. Suffers a penalty equal to the person's current encumbrance level. A Judo throw cannot be used on an opponent with more than twice the attacker's ST.

Karate (p. B203): Increases attacking options, and reduces the chance of injury when parrying unarmed against an armed foe. Allows unarmed parrying of two different attacks per turn, one with each hand, and gives an improved retreating bonus when parrying. Suffers a penalty equal to the person's current encumbrance level.

In very basic game terms, ignoring a few small details, Brawling is "fighting with all body parts and a small damage bonus" while Karate is "fighting with all body parts and a large damage bonus." The damage bonus is what bumps Karate up two difficulty steps. If you take out "all body parts" but keep the damage bonus, you get Boxing; in essence, Boxing is defined as "fighting with just the hands and a large damage bonus."

Sumo Wrestling (p. B223): Increases the chance to break free from a grapple, and improves your odds with a grapple, slam, shove, or takedown. Unarmed parries require both hands, at a penalty against kicks and weapons.

Wrestling (p. B228): Increases the chance to break free from a grapple, and improves your odds with a grapple, takedown, choke, neck snap, or pin. Unarmed parries require both hands, at a penalty against weapons. Unlike Sumo Wrestling, kicks *can* be parried without penalty.

As *Unarmed Combat* (p. B370) says, you can use your best grappling skill – any of Judo, Sumo Wrestling, or Wrestling – for a grab, grapple, or takedown. Judo has no effect on ST. Slams are the specific territory of Brawling and Sumo Wrestling, and only Sumo Wrestling helps with a shove.

This is an effort to diversify skills: Judo lets you parry well, make throws, and grab people, and has favorable defaults to locks and holds. Wrestling lets you grab people and take them down, gives a ST bonus for pins, and gives defaults to several locks and holds as well. Sumo Wrestling lets you grab people, slam into them, shove them, and knock them around, and gives a ST bonus, but doesn't teach locks or holds. Pick the one you plan to use the most; they're different styles of close combat.

Weapons

Many weapon skills default from other skills, but it's best to put points directly into the weapon skill likely to be used. This increases both the chance to hit and the chance to parry (for melee weapons). A useful list of all weapon skills appears on p. 55 of ***Martial Arts.*** See also ***Martial Arts, Low-Tech, High-Tech,*** and ***Ultra-Tech*** for *many* more weapons beyond those in the ***Basic Set*** (though the supplements introduce no additional skills to use them).

Shields and Cloaks

With the Shield (p. B220) or Cloak (p. B184) skill, a carried shield or a handheld cloak can be used for both melee attacks and blocking as an active defense.

A cloak is used like a shield – as implied by both the Cloak skill write-up and the cloak's listing under Shields (p. B287). It gives DB only when partly wrapped around one arm or held in one hand, and then used to brush incoming weapons aside (either on its own or by padding the hand enough to allow it to assist) and to partly obscure the body from frontal attackers. Worn on the back, it doesn't do much at all. Well, a heavy cloak might add +1 to DR from the rear, but there's no DB.

In any event, you can only benefit from one source of handheld DB, whether it comes from a shield per se, a buckler, or a cloak. These things never "stack." Magical DB does, but that's not handheld.

Other Skills

These skills support and enhance combat effectiveness. Many are cinematic or supernatural, and may not be available to PCs (GM's option), but tougher NPCs might have one or two.

Acrobatics (p. B174): Rolled against when attempting an Acrobatic Dodge (p. B375) and many combat maneuvers from ***Martial Arts*** (Acrobatic Attack, Acrobatic Movement, chambara fighting, and others). Also used by beings with four or more legs to pounce (see *Pounce,* p. B372).

Blind Fighting (p. B180): Negates or lowers penalties for darkness, blindness, or fighting an invisible foe. Enemies skilled at Blind Fighting, when PCs are not, will have a huge advantage if attacking in darkness.

Breaking Blow (p. B182): Grants an armor divisor to certain unarmed attacks, after spending 1 FP and *many* seconds of concentration.

Fast-Draw (pp. B194-195; ***Martial Arts,*** pp. 103-104): Permits readying weapons without a Ready maneuver, or speeds up reload times for ranged weapons. Particularly useful for increasing the speed at which NPC ranged fighters can fire muscle-powered weapons at the party, or for reloading firearms to continue shooting. See also *Who Draws First?, Fast-Draw from Odd Positions,* and *Quick-Readying Nearby Weapons* on pp. 103-104 of ***Martial Arts.***

Fast-Draw means getting a weapon out in so little time that you can do the same attacking, defending, and movement that you could do had you had it in your hand the whole time. That's borderline-cinematic, and given no default for the same reason that Parry Missile Weapons has no default.

Flying Leap (p. B196): By spending 1 FP, you can triple jumping distance (see *Jumping,* p. B352). Improves damage and knockback when jumping into an opponent.

Immovable Stance (p. B201): Heightens defense against knockback, knockdown, and Judo attacks.

Innate Attack (p. B201): Increases the chance to hit with inherent ranged attacks, such as those from Affliction, Binding, Innate Attack, magic, etc. Nearly any caster with a Missile spell benefits from this skill.

Kiai (p. B203): A shout that, by spending 1 FP, can mentally stun an opponent.

Leadership (p. B204): Grants possible morale and self-control bonuses to friendly combatants if the leader gives orders and encouragement in place of actively fighting.

Mental Strength (p. B209): Replaces Will when resisting magic, psionics, Kiai, and similar attacks.

Parry Missile Weapons (p. B212): Allows a chance to parry thrown or missile weapons with a melee weapon, or even hands. If combined with Enhanced Time Sense, the combatant can try to parry bullets!

Power Blow (p. B215): Double (or even triple) ST for the purpose of figuring combat damage by spending 1 FP. An enemy with this skill is capable of some devastating attacks.

Pressure Points (p. B215): Ability to disable opponents merely by touching them with an unarmed attack or blunt (crushing damage) weapon.

Pressure Secrets (p. B215): Makes unarmed attacks do impaling damage, which doubles or even triples the injury from damage that penetrates DR.

Push (p. B216): A barehanded attack that inflicts extra knockback.

Tactics (p. B224): Useful for actions such as gaining an advantageous position in combat, noticing danger, and outmaneuvering enemies.

Zen Archery (p. B228): A difficult skill to use during combat, as it takes a *very* long time (32 seconds!) to reach full effectiveness. At that point, though, all size and speed/range penalties are divided by 3.

Skill Sets

Warriors need more than just a few core skills! Those expecting combat should have at *least* the following.

Low-Tech Example

- Unarmed Striking (one of Boxing, Brawling, or Karate)
- Unarmed Grappling (one of Judo, Sumo Wrestling, or Wrestling)
- Primary Armed (e.g., Broadsword)
- Secondary Armed (e.g., Knife)
- Ranged (e.g., Bow, Crossbow, Thrown Weapon)
- Fast-Draw Skills (e.g., Arrow, Knife, Sword)

High-Tech Example

- Unarmed Striking (one of Boxing, Brawling, or Karate)
- Unarmed Grappling (one of Judo, Sumo Wrestling, or Wrestling)
- Primary Firearm (e.g., Guns (Rifle))
- Secondary Firearm (e.g., Guns (Pistol))
- Melee (Knife for combat knife, Spear for bayonet, etc.)
- Fast-Draw Skills (e.g., Ammo, Pistol, Long Arm)

Other skills will of course be useful, such as Shield for those who own one, Throwing for grenades, or First Aid for attending to wounds, but these examples are an excellent start.

The Four Main Styles

Almost all melee fighters fall into one of these four styles, each with its own strengths and weaknesses.

- *Single one-handed weapon.* Good when expecting to face a single foe at very close quarters (or when a free hand is important). This is descriptive of knife fights and close action aboard ship. This style somewhat suits rogues, sailors, and others who don't usually fight but who might have to do so at times.
- *Two weapons.* Good when expecting to face multiple, low-threat foes in high-mobility battle. This is descriptive of nothing much in real life, but isn't unlike the classic "kobold horde" of fantasy. This style might suit swashbuckling rogues and other light fighters.
- *Weapon and shield.* Good when expecting to face multiple, high-threat foes in low-mobility battle. This is descriptive of a crowded battlefield. This style is probably best for most dedicated low-tech warriors.
- *Two-handed weapon.* Good when expecting to face a single, high-threat foe in high-mobility battle. This is descriptive of a duel or the classic fantasy face-off against a "boss monster" (as long as it doesn't breathe fire . . .). This style is good for sword-saints and hulking barbarian thugs alike.

Example configurations for a ST 12, DX 12, IQ 10, HT 12 guy at typical fantasy TL3 with BL 29, Damage 1d-1/1d+2, Basic Speed 6.00, and Average wealth ($1,000) might be:

● *Thrusting broadsword.* Cost $600. Weight 3 lbs. Has $400 left for armor, and buys light scale armor (DR 3), studded leather skirt (DR 3/2), and heavy leather sleeves, helm, gloves, and boots (DR 2), for $390, 24.5 lbs. Total weight is 27.5 lbs., or No Encumbrance. Assuming 100 points for attributes and combat skills, invests 20 points in combat skills: Broadword-16 [16], Wrestling-13 [4]. Movement: Move 6. Defense: Dodge 9, Parry 11 (×1). Offense: 1d+3 cut/1d+1 imp at 16 (×1), Reach 1.

Pros: Highest torso DR, best grappler in close combat.

Cons: Fewest defenses (tied).

● *Thrusting broadsword and hatchet.* Cost $640. Weight 5 lbs. Has $360 left for armor, and buys heavy leather armor, leggings, sleeves, helm, gloves, and boots (DR 2), for $340, 19.5 lbs. Total weight is 24.5 lbs., or No Encumbrance. Assuming 100 points for attributes and combat skills, invests 20 points in combat skills: Broadsword-14 [8], Axe/Mace-13 [4], Dual-Weapon Attack* (Broadsword)-12 [3], Dual-Weapon Attack* (Axe/Mace)-12 [4], Off-Hand Weapon Training (Axe/Mace) [1] [a perk in ***Martial Arts,*** p. 50]. Movement: Move 6. Defense: Dodge 9, Parry 10 (×1) and 9 (×1). Offense: 1d+3 cut/1d+1 imp at 12 (×1) and 1d+2 cut at 12 (×1), Reach 1.

Pros: Most attacks, most parries.

Cons: Lowest effective skill, lowest effective defenses.

[* A technique; see below.]

● *Thrusting broadsword and medium shield* (DB 2). Cost $660. Weight 18 lbs. Has $340 left for armor, and buys heavy leather armor, leggings, sleeves, helm, gloves, and boots (DR 2), for $340, 19.5 lbs. Total weight is 37.5 lbs., or Light Encumbrance. Assuming 100 points for attributes and combat skills, invests 20 points in combat skills: Broadword-16 [16], Shield-14 [4]. Movement: Move 4. Defense: Dodge 8, Parry 11 (×1), Block 10 (×1), all defenses +2 for shield DB. Offense: 1d+3 cut/1d+1 imp at 16 (×1), Reach 1.

Pros: Highest effective defenses, has a block vs. missiles.

Cons: Lowest Move and Dodge, penalized in close combat.

● *Two-handed sword.* Cost $900. Weight 7 lbs. Has $100 left for armor, and buys cloth armor, cloth cap, cloth gloves, and shoes (DR 1), for $90, 8 lbs. Total weight is 15 lbs., or No Encumbrance. Assuming 100 points for attributes and combat skills, invests 20 points in combat skills: Two-Handed Sword-17 [20]. Movement: Move 6. Defense: Dodge 9, Parry 11 (×1). Offense: 1d+5 cut/1d+2 imp at 17 (×1), Reach 2.

Pros: Highest effective skill, highest damage, best Reach, least-breakable weapon.

Cons: Worst overall DR, fewest defenses (tied).

Note that these examples only show combat abilities specific to the weapons purchased. Actual adventurers would have many more, including additional combat skills (see *Skill Sets*, p. 46, for some ideas), noncombat skills, advantages, and disadvantages.

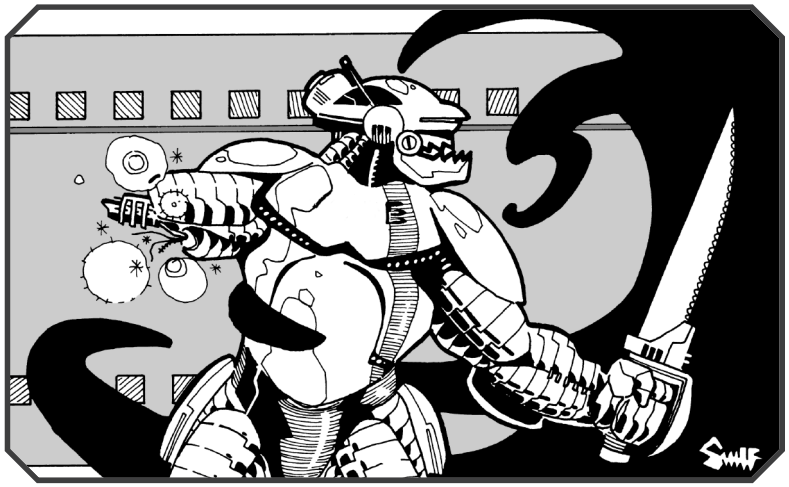
Techniques

Techniques are an optional system for improving specific applications of a skill, instead of raising the overall skill level, as explained on pp. B229-230. For example, with a Karate skill of 15, you would roll against 11 to do a Jump Kick, which is Karate-4 to hit. However, if you raise your Jump Kick technique to "Default+2," you'd instead roll against a 13.

Enemies who know even one or two techniques at higher levels pose a much greater threat, as they are able to use difficult-but-effective moves with greater-than-expected odds of success.

USEFUL COMBAT ADVANTAGES

There are a huge number of advantages beneficial to combat-oriented characters. The GM should use these suggestions to customize opponents the PCs face. Note that several of these are exotic or supernatural traits, however, and are thus unsuited for mundane human foes; always consult the description in the ***Basic Set*** for details.



Attack and Damage

These increase the number of attacks, allow special attacks, or increase damage.

Affliction (pp. B35-36; ***Powers,*** p. 9): This represents having a special, nondamaging attack – putting the target to sleep, making him nauseous, etc. Expanded greatly in ***Powers.*** Note that targets *always* have a chance to resist, even if enhancements like *Cosmic, Irresistible attack* (p. B103) are added.

Ambidexterity (p. B39): Eliminates the usual -4 for tasks with the "off" hand – *and that is all*. While it can be useful in combat to use both hands equally well, Ambidexterity by itself does *not* allow multiple attacks per turn.

Arm ST (p. B40): Increases ST for attacks made when using the arm that has Arm ST.

Binding (p. B40; ***Powers,*** p. 9): A special attack that grapples and roots a target in place, whether by webs, ice, hands from the ground, etc. Expanded greatly in ***Powers.*** If hit, target is at -4 to DX, can't change facing, and can't use the Move or Change Posture maneuvers until he breaks free, regardless of relative ST scores – meaning even a Binding attack with ST 1 will stop a ST 20 target until the target wins a Quick Contest to break free.

Claws (pp. B42-43): Hands and feet have claws, hooves, talons, etc. Increases unarmed melee damage, and in some cases, changes the damage type from crushing to cutting or impaling.

Constriction Attack (p. B43): The ability to crush opponents for increased damage once they are grappled.

Extra Arms (p. B53): Extra arms don't automatically give multiple attacks (see *Extra Attack* for that), but they do give bonuses in close combat.

Extra Attack (pp. B53-54; ***Martial Arts,*** p. 44): Gives one extra attack per level, every turn, using a different attack each time. More than one level is outside the human norm, but even "just" one extra attack is a huge advantage! ***Martial Arts*** adds an important new enhancement, *Multi-Strike*, which allows using the same attack more than once.

Innate Attack (pp. B61-62; ***Powers,*** pp. 9-10): Represents an innate damaging attack, such as eyes that shoot lasers, a robot's built-in flamethrower, etc. This is greatly expanded using the optional ***Powers*** rules, and is the standard "direct damage" ability. Without the Melee Attack limitation (p. B112), Innate Attacks are considered "missile weapons," and as such cannot usually be blocked or parried (though see the Blockable limitation, ***Powers,*** p. 110).

Lifting ST (pp. B65-66): Adds to ST when choking, grappling, or otherwise applying slow, steady pressure. Rare for NPCs without point totals, since its biggest advantage is being cheaper than simply raising ST.

Striker (p. B88): Represents a body part capable of hitting in combat (but that can't be used to pick things up, open doors, etc.), such as horns or a tail that isn't prehensile.

Striking ST (pp. B88-89): Adds to ST when determining thrust and swing damage. Like Lifting ST, it is uncommon for NPCs.

Super Jump (p. B89): Doubles the height and distance you can jump. When used to slam an opponent, damage is determined using maximum jumping Move.

Teeth (p. B91): A sharp beak, sharp teeth, or fangs that inflict more damage than normal blunt teeth.

Vampiric Bite (p. B96; ***Powers,*** pp. 96-97): The ability to drain HP from a foe that is grappled or unable/unwilling to fight back (stunned, unconscious, etc.). HP drained this way heals the biter.

In order to keep the action fresh and exciting, I strive to stage fights in all kinds of settings.

– Kromm

Defense, Recovery, and Resistance

These advantages make someone harder to kill by making him harder to hit, making him harder to damage, or enhancing his ability to recover from wounds.

Combat Reflexes (p. B43): Extremely common for warriors, with numerous benefits: bonuses to active defense rolls, Fast-Draw skills, Fright Checks, IQ rolls for recovering from surprise and mental stun, and initiative rolls against surprise attacks.

Damage Resistance (p. B46-47): Provides a natural, innate DR that stacks with the DR from armor or other external sources, further reducing damage and injury from attacks.

Enhanced Defenses (p. B51): Allows the direct improvement of Dodge, Block, or Parry.

Extra Life (p. B55): The ability to return from the dead once for each time this is purchased. Definitely not for ordinary foes!

Fearlessness (p. B55): Increases resistance to Fright Checks and Intimidation rolls.

Fit and *Very Fit* (p. B55): Give bonuses to all HT rolls, improving chances to avoid unconsciousness, death, poison damage, etc. Also improves the rates at which FP are normally lost and gained, but specifically does *not* help recovery for fatigue spent to power magic or psionics, or lost to things like drugs, stunners, etc.

Flexibility (p. B56): In close combat, gives a bonus to attempts to break free.

Hard to Kill (pp. B58-59): Grants bonuses to HT rolls for avoiding death.

Hard to Subdue (p. B59): Grants bonuses to HT rolls for avoiding unconsciousness.

High Pain Threshold (p. B59): The ability to completely ignore the usual shock penalty for being wounded. Also gives a bonus to all HT rolls to avoid knockdown and stunning.

Injury Tolerance (pp. B60-61; ***Powers,*** pp. 52-53): Encompasses a variety of ways that bodily composition can reduce or negate the effects of ordinary damage, such as being made of particles, lacking vital organs or musculature, etc. ***Powers*** adds a new form, Damage Reduction.

Rapid Healing and *Very Rapid Healing* (p. B79): Improve the speed of HP recovery, and increase the odds of overcoming crippling wounds. Not often useful for NPCs, as its effects occur outside of combat.

Recovery (p. B80): Greatly increases how quickly the person recovers from unconsciousness. This could allow an NPC a chance to escape, or even to launch a surprise attack when least expected.

Regeneration (p. B80): Increases the speed of HP recovery even more than Rapid Healing (which it includes), though does nothing for missing limbs (that's Regrowth).

Regrowth (p. B80): Allows the regrowth of missing organs, limbs, and extremities. The times required to do this usually make it less useful for NPCs.

Resistant (pp. B80-81): Provides increased resistance to a particular class of substances or objects. Also grants a bonus to HT rolls to resist their damage.

Slippery (p. B85): Being slippery, for whatever reason, provides a bonus to all ST, DX, and Escape skill rolls for getting out of handcuffs or other restraints, or to break free in close combat.

Spines (p. B88): Short or long defensive spines on your body are useful for damaging in close combat, or when attempting to grapple or slam.

Supernatural Durability (p. B89): Includes High Pain Threshold, and gives complete immunity to shock, knockout, and physical stun. Also ignores crippling injuries and Move reduction based on low HP, as long as the person with this isn't below 0 HP. Even below 0 HP, he can only be truly killed by one specific item (specified when the advantage is purchased). This powerful advantage is best reserved for extremely challenging foes.

Unfazeable (p. B95): The main combat effect of this is to ignore Fright Checks and Intimidation.

Unkillable (p. B95): Another powerful advantage best suited for very potent enemies – gives immunity to HT rolls to avoid death, and allows fighting right up to the point of -10 × HP. Higher levels even let foes *return* from being killed, like unlimited Extra Lives (see above)!

Senses and Situational Awareness

Enemies with superior senses, that can perceive and react to things the PCs cannot, are difficult to fight. Many of these traits allow perceiving the world in ways most humans can't.

360° Vision (p. B34): This form of enhanced sight enables the person to defend normally against attacks from the sides and rear, and make attacks to those same hexes at -2 to hit instead of making a Wild Swing.

Acute Senses (p. B35): Increases Hearing, Taste and Smell, Touch, or Vision.

Altered Time Rate (pp. B38-39): Gives one extra maneuver, every combat turn, for each level purchased! The combat applications of this are considerable, letting the person move and attack much faster than normal (except for the Feint maneuver, which remains limited to a single use per turn).

A character with Altered Time Rate 1 gets two back-to-back turns whenever his number comes up in the combat sequence. He can therefore run half his Move while attacking twice with All-Out Attack (Double) – the attacks coming anywhere along his path – on his first turn, and then run half his Move *again* while getting all his normal defenses and +2 to Dodge by taking All-Out Defense (Increased Dodge) on his second turn. To external observers, this guy runs his full Move, attacks twice without sacrificing skill or defenses, and dodges at +2 when everybody else can only take a step, attack once, and dodge normally. That's how to game out the defensive effects of ATR. "One extra maneuver per turn" is what's worth 100 points, not all the other things that might go along with it. To round it out, buy the game-mechanical benefits you want: Basic Move, Basic Speed, Enhanced Defenses, Enhanced Time Sense, etc.

Danger Sense (p. B47): Represents a "gut feeling" of impending danger from a successful Perception roll (made by the GM). Handy for advance warnings of impending ambushes and such.

Dark Vision (p. B47), *Hyperspectral Vision* (p. B60), *Infravision* (p. B60), *Night Vision* (p. B71), and *Ultravision* (p. B94): Each of these advantages represents the ability to ignore some or all darkness penalties, giving a huge edge to enemies at night, in caves, etc. if the PCs don't have similar vision.

Enhanced Time Sense (p. B52): Boosts mental speed and reactions. All those with Enhanced Time Sense act before all those without.

Enhanced Tracking (p. B53): Allows for tracking more than one target at a time.

Perfect Balance (p. B74): Gives bonuses to Acrobatics and any DX or DX-based skill rolls to avoid falling down.

Peripheral Vision (pp. B74-75): This form of enhanced sight helps the person to defend normally against attacks from side hexes, and against attacks from the rear at -2. Also permits melee attacks into side hexes as well as the front.

See Invisible (p. B83): Fighting an invisible foe is extremely difficult without this. If any or all PCs can become invisible, enemies without this won't be much of a challenge.

Vibration Sense (p. B96): Allows a Sense roll to locate people and things by vibration instead of sight. Attack rolls suffer penalties for the target's size, speed, and range, but it's still useful for locating targets in low visibility situations.

Movement, Size, and Form

Advantages that give enemies an unusual body type or means of locomotion can make them more dangerous. For a discussion of Size Modifiers, see *Big and Small Fighters* (p. 50).

Duplication (pp. B50-51): The creation of exact duplicates allows a single enemy to fight as two, three, or even more.

Enhanced Move (p. B52): The increased movement this gives does *not* affect Dodge, but it does affect ranged attacks, which use the target's speed to determine speed/range modifiers (p. B550).

Flight (p. B56): A fighter who can fly has quite an advantage over one who can't! See *Flying Combat* on p. B398 for details.

Growth (p. B58) and *Shrinking* (p. B85): These allow the user to dramatically change his physical size.

Insubstantiality (pp. B62-63): An insubstantial enemy is completely unharmed by physical or energy attacks – only psionic or (nonmaterial) magic attacks can harm them. Anyone without those attacks is helpless.

Invisibility (p. B63): Invisible foes are very difficult to attack or defend against without superhuman senses.

Permeation (p. B75): Similar to Insubstantiality, except the user can only pass through a specific type of material, and he remains vulnerable to attacks that can reach him while so traveling.

Shadow Form (p. B83): The person in shadow form can't attack with physical attacks, but can use psionics, magic, etc. He takes only half damage from physical attacks, but receives 50% extra damage from light-based energy attacks. Other types of energy attack, psionics, and magic affect him normally.

Shapeshifting (pp. B83-85): A foe that can shift into a different form, especially one that is more combat-effective, is a great way to surprise players.

Walk on Air and *Walk on Liquid* (p. B97): Walking on air or liquid as if on solid ground could lead to a tactical advantage.

Warp (pp. B97-99): This advantage's main combat application is the ability, once per turn, to dodge by instantly teleporting to any visible hex within 10 yards. The IQ roll for this defense is at -10, but can be modified with the Reliable enhancement.

Luck, Magic, and Psionics

Certain advantages give a combatant a supernatural edge – or at least uncanny good fortune, which often *seems* supernatural!

Daredevil (p. B47): A kind of focused Luck, this gives a bonus to all skills, and the option to reroll critical failures, but only while taking unnecessary risks (as determined by the GM).

Energy Reserve (***Powers,*** p. 119; ***Thaumatology,*** p. 50): A pool of dedicated FP that triggers none of the penalties for suffering actual fatigue is extremely useful for those with special abilities fueled by FP.

Luck (p. B66) and *Super Luck* (p. B89): Despite some restrictions, these two advantages are powerful ways to influence the game. Some level of Luck can be useful to *all* PCs, as an "insurance policy" against catastrophic results.

Recommending to players that they buy their PCs Luck can't be emphasized enough; I'd call it one of the most important pieces of advice to any ***GURPS*** GM. I think Luck is the only "gimme" in an action campaign. Everything else is negotiable.

Big and Small Fighters

Battling enemies that are much larger or smaller impacts combat in many ways. The most immediate is that a target's Size Modifier (SM) is applied as a modifier to any roll to hit, whether in melee or ranged combat.

Note that p. B19 doesn't say "in ranged combat" or "only in ranged combat." The fact that SM doesn't appear in *Melee Attack Modifiers* (p. B547) is an oversight, I suppose . . . but not really. It was omitted for the same reason why speed isn't added to range in combat between fighters on foot (p. B550): as a simplification.

Thus, a larger target, with a positive SM, is always easier to hit, while a smaller target, with a negative SM, is always harder to hit. A popular *optional* rule from the online FAQ – for melee attacks only – is to take the *difference* in size between combatants, and apply that as a bonus to the smaller fighter (to a maximum of +4) and as a penalty to the larger one (no maximum). This adds a bit more complexity, but avoids situations where two tiny pixies have difficulty ever hitting one another, while two huge giants never miss each other.

Size Modifiers can affect melee combat in other ways:

- When attempting a grapple, the larger fighter gets +1 for every level of SM he has exceeding the smaller (p. B402).
- When attempting a pin, the larger combatant gets +3 for every level of SM he has exceeding the smaller (p. B370).
- If the attacker's SM is two or more smaller than the target's, he can grapple without having to match posture (p. B370).
- An attacker with a SM larger than his target's can grapple and squeeze the target's torso instead of the neck (p. B371).
- If the SM of two fighters differs by more than 1, they use the modifiers given under *Combat at Different Levels* (pp. B402-403) for melee attacks.
- A large SM increases the Reach of melee attacks (p. B402).
- An attacker whose SM exceeds his target's by two (or one, if the target is prone and the attacker isn't) can attempt to trample. If the attacker's SM exceeds the target's by three or more, this is a large-area injury (p. B404).
- An attacker whose SM exceeds his target's by seven or more inflicts large-area injury with melee attacks (p. B400).
- The energy cost to cast Regular spells on targets with a SM of +1 or more is multiplied by (1 + SM) (p. B239).
- An attacker can't use a Constriction Attack on a target whose SM exceeds his own (p. B43).
- Very small fighters have a number of optional rules on p. 76 of ***Powers,*** including Vision rolls for their target to see their attacks coming, if they are SM -10 or smaller; reduced penalties for targeting chinks in armor; crawling inside of unsealed armor, or even the target's body, to bypass DR if they are SM -13 or smaller; and more.

Weapons and Equipment

Clothing, armor, and similar personal gear are assumed to be fitted for SM 0 characters. To adjust the cost, weight, and power requirements of gear designed for those of larger or smaller SM, see the table *Adjusting for SM* (***Low-Tech,*** p. 8; ***High-Tech,*** p. 10; ***Ultra-Tech,*** p. 16). Even more detailed scaling options appear in ***Low-Tech Companion 2: Weapons and Warriors*** (pp. 20-21).

The ***Dungeon Fantasy*** series provides some additional, *unrealistic* size-related options. In ***Dungeon Fantasy 3: The Next Level*** (p. 8), armor for small adventurers has its weight reduced, and the armor's SM is applied as a penalty to its DR; weapons have their Reach, weight, and required ST similarly reduced, with the weapon's SM applied as a penalty to damage. In ***Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers*** (p. 27), large fighters of SM +1 can use oversized weapons, multiplying the cost, weight, required ST, and damage bonus by 1.5 (rounding down for damage, but always at least +1). For those who want to get adventuring more quickly, ***Dungeon Fantasy 13: Loadouts*** offers predesigned kits based on profession, including costs and weights for alternate SMs.

Magery (pp. B66-67): In worlds where magic exists, Magery is vital for making spellcasters powerful and threatening. It adds to IQ for purposes of learning spells, reduces the time needed to learn new spells, and in many cases, increases damage. Specific levels of Magery are required before some potent spells can even be learned, and high levels can push certain spells beyond their usual effects (see *Magery and Effect*, p. B237).

Magic Resistance (p. B67): Conversely, if one or more PCs are spellcasters, occasional levels of Magic Resistance can help enemies defend against them. The target's level of Magic Resistance is applied as a penalty to any skill roll for spells being cast, *and* as a bonus to rolls allowed for resisting.

Mana Damper and *Mana Enhancer* (pp. B67-68): These adjust the effective mana level nearby. See *Mana* (p. B235) for descriptions and effects of various mana levels. Enemy spellcasters with Mana Enhancer are much more potent, as they are effectively operating in a higher mana zone than everyone around them.

Mind Control (pp. B68-69): A foe with this ability is very dangerous, as he can attempt to literally take over a PC and force him to do things against his will.

Telekinesis (p. B92): The ability to affect distant objects, attempt to grab weapons, strike or choke other people, throw objects, and more, all from up to 10 yards away (or even farther, with the Increased Range enhancement, p. B106). The target defends as though being attacked by an invisible foe (p. B394). This is a great way for enemies to strike at the party without having to close to melee range.

Terror (p. B93): The user can cause anyone able to see *or* hear him (choose when taking it) to roll a Fright Check. Fits well with enemies who are overwhelmingly hideous or beautiful, have a supernatural howl, etc. See ***Powers*** (pp. 84-85) for the Awe and Confusion rules and table (similar to a Fright Check, but for those who provoke reactions of awe or confusion instead of fear).

Weapons and Training

A few advantages represent unusually high degrees of weapon training, or natural aptitude with weapons. These are well-suited for foes with above-average weapon skills, such as ninjas or Special Forces soldiers.

Gunslinger (p. B58; ***High-Tech,*** p. 249; ***Action 1: Heroes,*** p. 18; ***Gun Fu,*** pp. 15-16): The basic version of this advantage in the ***Basic Set*** is a bit tame, but for those using the expanded rules from supplements focused on firearms and gun battles (***High-Tech, Action***, ***Gun Fu***), it quickly shines as *the* advantage for cinematic gun fighters. (Heroic Archer – from ***Martial Arts,*** p. 45 – is the equivalent of this advantage for bows.)

Merging the ***Basic Set*** mechanics with those in ***High-Tech*** and ***Action*** (***Action*** pretty much cribs ***High-Tech,*** but it removes concepts regarded as too fussy for an action-movie game and adds one unique aspect):

- Always add Acc when firing single shots with a one-handed firearm (any Beam Weapons, Gunner, Guns, or Liquid Projector weapon) during an Attack or All-Out Attack maneuver.
- Always add half Acc when firing single shots with a two-handed firearm or laying down automatic fire with any firearm during an Attack or All-Out Attack maneuver.
- Ignore firearms Bulk during a Move and Attack maneuver.
- Ignore firearms Bulk in close combat.
- Ignore all penalties to firearms attacks for jumping or acrobatic movement on foot.
- Ignore the -2 for pop-up attacks (p. B390), as per the Cool Under Fire perk from ***Gun Fu,*** p. 18.
- Halve default penalties for the Fanning, Fast-Firing, Quick-Shot, Thumbing, and Two-Handed Thumbing firearms techniques.
- Halve all penalties to Fast-Draw (Ammo).
- May choose any cinematic perk, skill, or technique that could logically work with a firearm.
- Attack with a firearm during any chase maneuver but Hide (only found in ***Action***, with the rules for chases).

So if you use ***High-Tech, Action,*** and/or ***Gun Fu,*** this is a "must-have" advantage, simply because there are perks and techniques you can't get without it, because it enables gunfire during crazy chase maneuvers, and because the sum-total penalties halved or eliminated can be extremely large (especially when engaging in acrobatics).

Trained by a Master (p. B93; ***Martial Arts,*** p. 48): A cinematic advantage with a variety of combat-related benefits. The trained person can halve the usual penalty for multiple parries in a turn, and for making a Rapid Strike when using an unarmed or Melee Weapon skill. He can also learn exotic abilities such as Flying Leap and Power Blow.

Telekinesis in Combat

Keep the following points in mind when using Telekinesis (TK) in combat.

- Telekinesis simply gives control of two invisible hands, usable in any hex the user can see up to 10 yards away – and that's it. They can only do things that normal hands can do; additional abilities still require appropriate advantages (Affliction, Binding, etc.).

Telekinesis works just like two bare hands, which means that any blows or grapples are thrown at DX, strikes do punching damage (thrust-1), and parries are at (DX/2)+3. If you happen to know an unarmed skill and/or techniques that go with it, then you can use your training in these situations just as you could with your bare hands.

TK on its own can do anything that an invisible man of the same ST, standing in close combat, could do with just his hands. It can punch, grab items, grapple, and execute followups to grapples, like takedowns and throws. All of this interacts with DR normally. If you punch, it's always outside the DR, even if the DR is transparent, and the DR always applies. If you squeeze or pull, it's no different from a close-combat choke or Neck Snap or Wrench Limb attempt at the same ST, and if the DR is rigid, it applies . . . again, even if you can see beyond it. TK effects *cannot manifest internally.* To get that, either open up the target (remove a panel, use Surgery to cut him open, etc.) so you could reach in if you were standing there in close combat in person, or use your TK as an excuse to buy an alternative attack.

- Telekinesis requires sufficient strength to perform a task. Telekinesis with a ST of 1 is much less useful than with a ST of 4.

Everything TK does is ST-limited. The tasks to which it gives bonuses are no exception. Basic Lift is a measure of what can be manipulated by one hand, so ST 1 lets you handle 0.2 lb. For a typical lock, you'll need at least ST 2. For a high-security lock, at least ST 3. For surgery involving, say, a liver or a brain, or wielding a straight razor (***Martial Arts,*** p. 228), ST 4.

- Telekinesis with the Area Effect modifier (see ***Powers,*** p. 82) becomes even more powerful, in effect allowing "infinite hands" within the area of effect, though using more than two of those hands to do anything focused (such as attacking) still requires the usual other traits (like Extra Attack).

If using the rules from ***Martial Arts,*** this also makes him eligible for superhuman options such as Altered Time Rate, chambara fighting (***Martial Arts,*** pp. 128-130), Bullet Time (***Martial Arts,*** p. 133), and more.

Weapon Master (p. B99; ***Martial Arts,*** p. 48): Similar to Trained by a Master, but relevant only to muscle-powered weapon abilities. In addition to the benefits of Trained by a Master, increases basic damage.

Combat Disadvantages

These disadvantages have a negative impact on combat effectiveness. Most enemies, especially those meant to be a serious challenge, will not have any of these, but PCs might. The GM may also give one of these disadvantages to truly epic villains, to provide them with a weakness that can be exploited. Remember to enforce the effects of these disadvantages on PCs who take them.

Crippled or Missing Body Parts

These physical handicaps vary in their impact on the ability to fight, but they are all limiting in some way.

Lame (pp. B141-142): This covers a range of possible leg handicaps, all of which reduce Basic Move, and have specific penalties to skills requiring legs (such as attacking with unarmed or Melee Weapon skills).

Missing Digit (p. B144): Gives a penalty to DX for all actions with the affected hand.

No Legs (p. B145): This is *not* the disadvantage for a normal human missing both legs (see Lame for that); this is the disadvantage for races that are naturally legless and unable to kick in combat.

One Arm (p. B147): A missing arm prevents someone from wielding two weapons at once, a weapon and a shield, or two-handed weapons (though with a ST of 1.5 or 2 times greater than that needed, the person can wield a two-handed weapon in one hand, using a different skill; see *One-Handed Two-Handers* on p. 220 of ***Martial Arts***). Performing activities that normally require two arms, but are possible with just one, are at a penalty.

One Eye (p. B147): In combat, the impaired fighter has a penalty to both DX and to ranged attacks if he did not choose to Aim.

One Hand (p. B147): Similar to One Arm, except the combatant can still make unarmed parries. Some prosthetic replacements, like a claw or hook, can be used in combat like a large knife.

Quadriplegic (p. B150): The subject is either missing all arms and legs, or still has them but they are paralyzed. It's nearly impossible to engage in any sort of combat besides psionics, magic, mentally controlling a robot, etc.

Chronic Conditions

These physical conditions also hinder the ability to fight well, but may not be immediately visible to others.

Bad Back (p. B123): Forces a HT roll to avoid "throwing your back out" whenever making any kind of "athletic" skill roll, ST roll, or a 17 or 18 in melee combat. Depending on the severity, a failed HT roll means various DX and IQ penalties, and possibly even injury.

Bad Grip (p. B123): Gives a penalty to all tasks requiring a strong grip, including using melee weapons.

Chronic Pain (p. B126): An episode of Chronic Pain inflicts penalties to both DX and IQ.

Epilepsy (p. B136): Exposure to the object of a Phobia or a stressful situation (like combat) requires a HT roll to avoid a seizure, which prevents all actions for 1d minutes and causes FP loss.

Low Pain Threshold (p. B142): Doubles normal shock penalties, increasing the usual maximum of -4 to -8. The person also gets a penalty to avoid stunning or knockdown, and must make a Will roll to not make noise when suffering more than 1 HP of injury. A very bad disadvantage!

Unfit and *Very Unfit* (p. B160): Give penalties to all HT rolls, and decrease the chances to avoid unconsciousness, death, poison damage, etc. Also hasten the rate at which fatigue is lost, and worsen the rate at which it's regained.

Weak Bite (p. B161): Lowers biting damage.

Wounded (p. B162): A wound that never heals requires daily bandaging to avoid a penalty to HT rolls for avoiding infection. Those aware of the wound may attack it (-7 to hit) for increased damage.

Senses

As above-average senses are a great benefit in combat, poor senses are a liability.

Bad Sight (p. B123): Gives penalties to Vision rolls and certain combat rolls.

Blindness (pp. B124-125): Blind characters have a huge penalty to all combat skills. Attacks can't use hit locations, and ranged attacks can only target random hexes, or enemies close enough to be heard. A blind enemy, with no other heightened sense to rely on, is of little threat.

Deafness (p. B129): Being unable to hear anything may not affect combat directly (though Hearing rolls to target invisible foes, or foes in a dark room, are impossible), but it does make it impossible to hear orders shouted in the midst of battle, enemies sneaking up from behind, etc.

Decreased Time Rate (p. B129): Time is perceived so slowly that, in combat, the person can only act every *other* turn – that is, choosing a maneuver every two seconds instead of every one. For most PCs, this would be a crippling disadvantage.

Hard of Hearing (p. B138): Penalizes all Hearing rolls and all skill rolls for tasks reliant on understanding spoken communication.

Night Blindness (p. B144): Increases vision penalties due to darkness.

No Depth Perception (p. B145): Combat effects are identical to One Eye (p. B147).

Restricted Vision (p. B151): A field of vision narrower than average puts restrictions on both attack and defense (see the disadvantage description for a diagram).

Mental

Many mental disadvantages come into play during combat.

Berserk (p. B124; ***Martial Arts,*** p. 179): This can actually make an enemy *more* dangerous! A berserk combatant must attack someone every turn, friend or foe. He is also likely to continue fighting despite normally incapacitating injuries (though even a berserker will still pass out at -FP).

Code of Honor (p. B127): The many possible Codes of Honor all entail limiting choices. For hostile NPCs, these codes can ensure they won't, for example, slit the throat of any PC knocked unconscious, or use poison on their blades.

Combat Paralysis (p. B127): The suffer has -2 on all Fright Checks. In the face of immediate danger, the person must roll vs. HT and is likely to freeze up completely. Regardless of HT, a roll of 14+ fails, leading to mental stun. Make a new HT roll every turn to snap out of stun, at a cumulative +1 per turn (and an extra +1 if someone else is shaking the victim, slapping him, etc.) Very rarely a good trait for a PC, but handy for clearly labeling NPCs as noncombatants.

Cowardice (p. B129): Gives a penalty to Fright Checks. Also requires a self-control roll to engage in any physically dangerous activity.

Flashbacks (p. B136): Experiencing flashbacks when under stress either penalizes all skill use or makes skill use impossible.

On the Edge (pp. B146-147): The main combat effect is to require a self-control roll at the beginning of every combat turn – failure forces the person to perform an All-Out Attack, or something else equally dangerous and likely to result in injury. Fighters with this disadvantage may not live long!

Pacifism (p. B148): There are many forms, but all put limits on combat choices. One type, Reluctant Killer, actually gives a penalty to attack rolls. Appropriate (and realistic) for most noncombatants.

Phobias (pp. B148-150): Fights can easily occur in an area that triggers the phobias of one or more PCs; on a beach, for those afraid of water, or in a cave, for those afraid of the dark. A failed self-control roll in such a situation calls for a roll on the *Fright Check Table* (pp. B360-361), adding the margin of failure to the result. Even a success results in penalties to DX, IQ, and all skill rolls for as long as the situation persists.

Post-Combat Shakes (p. B150): This doesn't have an effect until combat is over, when a self-control roll must be made. On a failure, roll on the *Fright Check Table* (pp. B360-361), adding the margin of failure to the result.

Recovery and Damage

These disadvantages cover those who are easier to wound or kill, or who have unusual vulnerabilities that most humans do not.

Easy to Kill (p. B134): Gives a penalty to HT rolls made to avoid instant death, or to survive at -HP or below. Great for fodder NPCs.

Fragile (pp. B136-137): Suffering enough damage causes additional effects to occur that wouldn't for normal humans. The person may be prone to catching fire, exploding, losing body parts, etc. Many monsters, constructs, and supernatural enemies have this disadvantage.

Hemophilia (p. B138): Only possible with HT 10 or less, this is for those who bleed excessively or with little cause. All wounds continue to bleed until treated by First Aid, causing their original damage once every minute. Impaling wounds to the torso are even worse, requiring the Surgery skill to stop internal bleeding from inflicting further damage every day.

Slow Healing (p. B155): Doesn't affect HP loss during combat, but dramatically slows HP recovery. Useless for most NPCs.

Susceptible (p. B158): An unusual sensitivity to the effects of certain substances or items forces a HT penalty when trying to resist their effects.

Unhealing (p. B160): With this disadvantage, lost HP cannot be recovered normally or without specialized assistance. Usually for automatons, machines, minions, etc.

Vulnerability (p. B161): Applies a special wounding modifier to damage from specific kinds of attacks, which kicks in before the usual wounding modifier for attack type. Useful for enemy monsters and the like that can only be defeated by knowing their Vulnerability, like a dragon that takes extra damage from cold-iron weapons.

Weakness (p. B161): Simply being exposed to the substance or circumstance of the Weakness for the specified interval (or fraction thereof!) causes damage that bypasses DR entirely (such as a vampire's Weakness to sunlight).

Luck, Magic, and Psionics

Naturally, not all supernatural traits are helpful. Some are merely inconvenient, but others can really turn a hero's life into a train wreck. Be sure players know what they're in for if they choose these disadvantages.

Cursed (p. B129): This can be a truly debilitating disadvantage, and make life excruciating for the sufferer. For example, a Cursed person can be kept awake at night by construction right outside his window; have his refrigerated food spoiled and alarm clock not go off because the power fails during the night; be unable to shower because there is a "clerical error" with his water bill; find hungry moths have infested his clothes closet; and then, when he finally makes it out of the house, find his car has a flat tire. All that just trying to get to work! This disadvantage is *not* for the faint of heart, as it gives the GM free rein to mess with the victim at any time, in any way, for any reason.

Magic Susceptibility (p. B143): The Magic Susceptibility level is applied as a bonus to any skill roll for a spell cast on the person, and as a penalty to any roll allowed for resistance. This is dangerous to have in worlds where magic and spellcasters are common!

Supersensitive (p. B158): A psychic "buzzing" that inflicts a DX and IQ penalty based on how many other sentient beings are within 20 yards. If surrounded by enough beings (once the penalty lowers DX or IQ to below half), the person is completely unable to act at all.

Unluckiness (p. B160): One time during every game session, the GM simply makes something go wrong for the person. This unluckiness often strikes during combat.

Weirdness Magnet (p. B161): Like a weaker version of Cursed, above, with effects more *strange* than anything. In combat, the afflicted's weapon may develop sentience and refuse to fight, a healing spell cast on him may also cause his hair to grow fast enough to get in his eyes, or a swarm of local insects may surround him "protectively" (which actually hampers his actions).

MAGIC AND PSIONICS

Supernatural, superhuman abilities like magic and psionics have nearly unlimited combat uses. Whether low-powered conveniences like lighting flaming arrows without a torch, or epic effects like massive exploding fireballs that destroy castle walls, these abilities strongly influence the tide of battle.

A villain with sorcerous or mental abilities is a tough challenge for heroes with no defenses against them. A series of adventures could be run as the heroes' search to acquire these types of abilities themselves in preparation for a final confrontation.

Both magic and psionics are covered extensively in their own books. While the ***Basic Set*** rules suffice for basic use, if you're running campaigns that feature one or both prominently you'd be well advised to explore them.

Magic

In addition to the *Magic* chapter (pp. B234-253), the rules for magic are greatly expanded in ***Magic*** and ***Thaumatology.***

In combat, the most obvious use of magic is to cast purely destructive spells, like Lightning or Explosive Fireball. That's only a part of its utility. Other spells can be used to obscure the battlefield (e.g., Darkness and Fog), heal the wounded (e.g., Major Healing and Great Healing), make it harder for enemies to fight (e.g., Spasm and Rooted Feet), remove enemies from combat without injuring them (e.g., Mass Daze and Mass Sleep), protect friendly combatants (e.g., Shield and Armor), and even more.

Warriors in ***GURPS*** are actually more fiddly than wizards. You have to know what each hit location does when you hit it, which weapon works best vs. which hit location, when to prefer a thrust to a swing, when to go for chinks in the armor, when to feint, when to use a Deceptive Attack, when to use a Rapid Strike, and how to combine all of this stuff. Not to mention how to parcel out one block, one retreat, that first and best parry, and later, penalized parries. And how to use ancillary skills, such as Acrobatics for a Dodge bonus, Wrestling in close combat, etc. A mage just has to stand there and say, "I cast Dehydrate on Orc #4."

Psionics

Beyond the *Psionics* chapter (pp. B254-257), psionics are covered in much more detail in ***Psionic Campaigns***, ***Psionic Powers, Psis,*** and ***Dungeon Fantasy 14: Psi***. As with magic, psionic abilities allow for more than just straightforward combat uses like throwing things at enemies with Telekinesis. They can also enhance a fighter's senses (e.g., Danger Sense and See Invisible), heal the wounded (e.g., Healing and Regeneration), take control of enemies (e.g., Mind Control and Possession), and more.

I prefer to ad lib and have my campaign evolve constantly.

– Kromm

Improving Attacks

There are multiple ways to improve an NPC's attacks, usually to make an encounter more challenging, or just to keep the party from steamrolling over a foe that was supposed to put up a fight. Simply by changing tactics, an enemy that posed no danger can suddenly become a very real threat.

Increased Chance to Hit

An enemy can't injure anyone if he can't even hit! Luckily, there are ways to enhance this.

Aim (p. B364): Spend a turn aiming a particular ranged weapon at a specific target. On the following turn, that weapon's Accuracy is added to the attack roll against the target. Further bonuses are possible by aiming for more than one second, bracing, using a weapon scope, etc. For even more accurate shots, see *Precision Aiming* (***High-Tech,*** p. 84; ***Tactical Shooting,*** pp. 26-27).

All-Out Attack (Determined) (p. B365): Make a single attack with a bonus to hit, but lose all active defenses for that turn. Because of this, it's mostly reserved for those with nothing to lose, the crazy, or the woefully untrained.

Committed Attack (Determined) (***Martial Arts,*** pp. 99-100): Allows a single melee attack at +2 to hit, but defenses are somewhat compromised.

Good fighters don't throw away their defenses when enemies can hit them. With the debut of ***Martial Arts*** and Telegraphic Attack, good fighters should use Committed Attack where they might once have used All-Out Attack.

Evaluate (pp. B364-365): Similar to aiming, but for melee weapons. Adds +1 to hit with a melee attack on the turn following an Evaluate maneuver, to a maximum of +3 (after assessing the situation for three seconds).

Evaluate mostly sees use immediately before a sudden attack that initiates combat. It isn't as generally useful as Attack or Move – but then, all maneuvers *aren't* of equal value. Look at Do Nothing! We put Evaluate into Fourth Edition specifically to differentiate aggressors (who start combat after three Evaluates, for +3) from their victims (who enter combat after a series of Do Nothings). We didn't seriously think that fighters would often select it (or Do Nothing!) in a raging fight.

Telegraphic Attack (***Martial Arts,*** p. 113): This melee combat option gives +4 to hit, but also gives the target +2 to defend. It can't be combined with, or used alongside, a Deceptive Attack, Riposte, Feint, or Evaluate. The temporary bonus to skill is *not* considered when determining critical hits.

Real life says that's exactly how you use a Telegraphic Attack: wait until your foe is unable to defend, then put in a finishing move that he would normally just swat aside. The classic use of Telegraphic Attack is to land a big haymaker to the face at -1 instead of -5 after your foe has foolishly opened up his guard with an All-Out Attack.

Weapon Bond (***High-Tech,*** p. 250; ***Martial Arts,*** p. 53; ***Power-Ups 2: Perks,*** p. 9): Possibly the most popular perk in ***GURPS,*** Weapon Bond gives +1 to effective skill when using one specific weapon. The weapon itself can be of any quality. Note that the Equipment Bond perk grants the same bonus for non-weapons (see ***High-Tech,*** p. 7; ***Power-Ups 2,*** p. 9).

Fighting With Two Weapons

While hacking with two weapons is a staple of fiction and "looks cool," it's often not the most effective way to fight.

I run a high-powered campaign and nobody – but nobody – is willing to give up the +2 to all defenses from a DB 2 medium shield merely so that they can strike with a weapon in either hand, the second strike coming from a crappy weapon that's not nearly as damaging or effective as their one, really nice weapon (especially a weapon with which they have a Weapon Bond).

And of course, there's the matter of two-handed weapons. Some people are quite willing to accept -6 when they need to strike twice if it means they can use a big-damage weapon with Reach 2 or 3, heavy enough to smash their enemies' weapons into splinters.

Paired weapons are mostly flash unless you're fortunate enough to have *two* really nice light weapons, no need for a shield (say, to stop arrows and 14-lb. sledges that would mash your one-handed weapon), and a GM who never deprives you of the specialty weapon you've raised Dual-Weapon Attack for. I'm not saying that they're useless, just that their utility isn't nearly as "obvious" as all that.

Most fighters are better off improving their main-hand weapon, and their skill with it, than dividing their attention and points. Having said that, for those who *do* want to fight with two weapons in ***GURPS,*** there are a number of common misconceptions.

- Wielding two weapons at once does *not* grant any kind of extra attacks by itself! Regardless of how many weapons you are using, the ability to attack more than once in a turn requires an All-Out Attack (Double) maneuver (p. B365), Rapid Strike (p. B370), Dual-Weapon Attack (p. B417), or either of the advantages Extra Attack (p. B53) or Altered Time Rate (pp. B38-39).
- Weapon attacks with a warrior's "off" hand are at -4 (this does *not* apply to unarmed attacks). The Ambidexterity (p. B39) advantage removes this penalty for *all* skills; the Off-Hand Weapon Training perk (***Martial Arts,*** p. 50; ***Power-Ups 2: Perks,*** pp. 16-17) removes this penalty for one, specific skill.
- The -4 for using the "off" hand is *not* the same as the -4 to both hands when making a Dual-Weapon Attack. If using a weapon, a fighter without Ambidexterity making a Dual-Weapon Attack is at -4/-8 to his attacks; a fighter with Ambidexterity is at -4/-4. The Dual-Weapon Attack technique (p. B230; ***Martial Arts,*** p. 83) allows you to buy down those penalties.
- The Dual-Weapon Attack technique is learned *per skill*. Therefore, a warrior attacking with two shortswords could make two DWA (Shortsword) rolls; but a warrior attacking with a shortsword and a knife would need a DWA (Shortsword) roll and a DWA (Knife) roll.
- Dual-Weapon Attack and Rapid Strike are entirely separate options, and cannot in any way be combined or "stacked."

As for "Why ever do Rapid Strike if you can do Dual-Weapon Attack and buy off the penalties with Ambidexterity and the DWA technique?," well, there are lots of reasons. RS is possible even in a realistic campaign; DWA, much less buying off the penalty, often isn't. Even if it's possible, DWA is a different technique for every single weapon skill, while RS works for anything you care to wield. And in a cinematic campaign where you can raise DWA, Weapon Master and Trained By A Master halve RS penalties, making them -3/-3 for everything and better than the -4/-4 for DWA for weapons you haven't studied. But most importantly, RS lets you use a single, really good weapon twice – DWA isn't much use if you can only find or afford one Sword o' Power or light saber or weapon with Weapon Bond – and lets you use a shield while you whack somebody twice with a weapon.

Multiple Attacks

Attacking several times per turn slightly increases your chance of landing a telling blow, though often at the cost of some defense. Even more detailed options for multiple attacks can be found in ***Martial Arts*** (pp. 126-128).

All-Out Attack (Double) (p. B365): Make two melee attacks against the same target, either with a single weapon that doesn't require readying after use, or with two ready weapons or empty hands (remember the usual -4 for weapon attacks with the "off" hand). This forfeits all active defenses for the turn.

Combinations (***Martial Arts,*** p. 80): Optional rule that allows the Rapid Strike penalties for Targeted Attacks that are always executed together to be bought off.

Dual-Weapon Attacks (p. B417): This optional combat rule permits one attack with each hand (which could be empty, holding a one-handed melee weapon, or using a pistol). Each attack is -4 to hit, with a further -4 for weapon attacks with the "off" hand (though Ambidexterity can mitigate this). Each hand's attack is resolved separately – melee targets must be next to one another if two foes are being targeted. If both attacks are at a single target, his active defense is at -1. Someone who already has multiple attacks can replace *one* of them with a Dual-Weapon Attack.

Flurry of Blows (p. B357): By spending 1 FP *per attack,* the normal Rapid Strike penalty is reduced by half (so the usual -6 would be -3).

Rapid Strike (p. B370): This melee option is used with an Attack or All-Out Attack to make one extra attack with a ready weapon or empty hand. Both attacks are -6 to hit. Someone who already has multiple attacks can replace *one* of them with a Rapid Strike.

Number of Attacks = 1 + Extra Attack Level + 1 if All-Out Attack (Double)

Example 1: A human with no Extra Attack has 1 + 0 + 0 = 1 attack normally, or 1 + 0 + 1 = 2 attacks with All-Out Attack (Double).

Example 2: A dragon with Extra Attack 3 has 1 + 3 + 0 = 4 attacks normally, or 1 + 3 + 1 = 5 attacks with All-Out Attack (Double).

In addition to the above, one can swap *one and only one* of those attacks for *either* a Rapid Strike that gives two attacks at -6 (-3 for those with Trained By A Master or Weapon Master) *or* a Dual-Weapon Attack that gives two attacks at -4 (plus a further -4 for the "off" hand with a weapon, unless one has Ambidexterity).

There are plenty of special-case exceptions – improving the Dual-Weapon Attack technique and buying Off-Hand Weapon Training, using Flurry of Blows to trade FP for half the usual Rapid Strike penalty, etc. – but the above is all one needs to get the gist of what's going on.

Altered Time Rate gives you an actual extra *maneuver.* You could, for instance, take All-Out Attack (Double) followed by All-Out Defense . . . or Concentrate followed by Attack . . . or Attack and Attack again . . . or whatever. The above guidelines on number of attacks apply separately to each of your maneuvers.

Extra Attack merely gives you one additional small-a attack or small-f feint if you choose a maneuver that lets you attack or feint in the first place (All-Out Attack, Attack, Feint, Move and Attack, or a triggered Wait). *It does not in any way give you an extra maneuver.* The "attack" it adds is a strike or grapple, not an Attack maneuver.

*Warriors in **GURPS** are actually more fiddly than wizards. You have to know what each hit location does when you hit it, which weapon works best vs. which hit location, when to prefer a thrust to a swing, when to go for chinks in the armor, when to feint, when to use a Deceptive Attack, when to use a Rapid Strike, and how to combine all of this stuff.*

– Kromm

Extra Damage

Sometimes for an opponent to become a threat, he doesn't need to boost his chance to hit, but rather has to boost his damage when he does hit.

All-Out Attack (Strong) (p. B365): Gives a damage bonus to a successful attack with a muscle-powered melee weapon. Forfeits all active defenses for the turn.

Committed Attack (Strong) (***Martial Arts,*** pp. 99-100): Gives a small damage bonus to a successful muscle-powered melee attack, but lowers the ability to defend.

Mighty Blows (p. B357): Spend 1 FP *per attack* to get the damage bonus of an All-Out Attack (Strong) with a regular Attack maneuver, and without forfeiting active defenses for the turn.

Mount or Vehicle (pp. B397 and B469-470): Using a melee weapon from a mount or vehicle with a velocity of 7 or more relative to the target increases damage. Also gives a penalty to hit, using the lower of Melee Weapon or Riding skill.

Reversed Grip (***Martial Arts,*** p. 111): Best suited for knives and other thrusting melee weapons, this grip increases thrust damage while lowering swing damage. It also affects the weapon's Reach, restricts which hexes can be attacked normally, and slightly improves the effects of a successful Deceptive Attack or Feint.

Techniques (pp. B229-232; ***Martial Arts***, pp. 63-95): A variety of techniques can raise damage, including Axe Kick, Exotic Hand Strike, and Jump Kick.

Weapon Quality (pp. B274, 277): Some weapons can get a damage bonus from being of fine or very fine quality. ***Martial Arts*** expands these rules (*Weapons of Quality,* ***Martial Arts,*** p. 216), and ***Ultra-Tech*** adds even more exotic materials (***Ultra-Tech,*** pp. 163-164). Note that firearms get a bonus to their base Acc or Malf. instead – see *Firearm Quality,* ***High-Tech,*** p. 79.

Weapon Master (p. B99): This advantage gives a damage bonus to basic swing and thrust damage for muscle-powered melee weapons.

Special Damage

An enemy who knows how to best take advantage of changing circumstances, and uses the most damaging attacks for each situation, is extremely dangerous.

Area and Spreading Attacks (pp. B413-414): These kinds of attacks (gas grenades, Area spells, etc.) inflict damage on multiple targets at once, usually without the lessening of damage that occurs with explosions for targets further from the point of impact. Diving for cover or retreating out of the area of effect are the only defenses.

Explosions (pp. B414-415): Explosions have the potential to injure multiple targets at once. In addition to damage to the target actually struck, an explosion produces collateral, and sometimes fragmentation, damage. Diving for cover is the only effective active defense. Truly challenging foes can attack from afar, lobbing explosives into the party.

Follow-Up Damage and *Linked Effects* (p. B381): Some attacks inflict additional injury that occur simultaneously with the primary damage (linked effects), or immediately following (follow-up damage). Some of these attacks can even bypass DR altogether. Note that a secondary damage effect is a *completely separate* roll from the primary damage. It is rolled, and applied, independent of the primary attack's damage.

Hit Locations (pp. B398-400; ***Martial Arts,*** p. 137): If using the optional hit location rules, attacking specific body parts is a very effective tactic. Injury to the arm has a very different effect from damage done to the vitals, or the skull. You should be well aware of these effects, and allow experienced NPC fighters to attack noticeable PC weak spots and go for shots to areas where they do the most harm. ***Martial Arts*** expands the list presented in the ***Basic Set.*** The supplement also introduces the *Targeted Attacks* optional rule (***Martial Arts,*** p. 68), allowing fighters to buy down the usual penalties.

Wounding Modifiers (p. B379): The *type* of damage inflicted plays an important part in increasing overall harm. Impaling and huge piercing attacks multiply their penetrating damage by ×2; cutting and large piercing attacks, by ×1.5; and small piercing, by ×0.5. All other damage types have no modifier.

Overcoming Attacks

The following tools can help the GM limit the effects of someone's high skill. Though it's often more effective to deal with opponents of higher skill by improving defenses against them, maneuvering the fight to interfere with their ability to attack works as well.

The Enemy's Skill: Attacks

Many circumstances temporarily lower a combatant's skill level.

Close Combat (p. B391; ***Martial Arts,*** pp. 114-119): Using a ranged weapon in close combat changes the attack from ranged to melee, allowing it to be parried (p. B376) and imposing a skill penalty equal to the weapon's Bulk (instead of the usual range penalties). If ***Martial Arts*** is being used, weapons longer than Reach "C" can be used in close combat, but at significant penalties to both attacks and parries (see *Long Weapons in Close Combat,* ***Martial Arts,*** p. 117).

Defensive Feint (***Martial Arts,*** p. 101): This is determined like any other feint, but instead of applying a penalty to the target's defense roll, it applies the penalty to the target's next attack roll against the one doing the feint.

Grappling (pp. B370-371): If grappled, the target has -4 to DX (and all DX-based skills) until he breaks free. If only a specific body part is grappled, then only actions with that body part are affected. For much more detail, get ***Martial Arts: Technical Grappling.***

Posture (p. B551): Those in any posture other than standing are at a penalty to any melee attack, as summarized in the *Posture Table* on p. B551. Note it's possible to be knocked prone by a shove (p. B372), knockback (p. B378), takedown (p. B370), or Judo throw (p. B203).

Shock (p. B419): When someone is injured, DX and IQ (and all skills based on them) are immediately reduced until the end of his next turn, to a maximum of -4 (or -8, with Low Pain Threshold). While this is only temporary, it may allow experienced enemies to attempt riskier maneuvers such as All-Out Attack or Telegraphic Attack, since the chance of a retaliatory strike is reduced.

The Enemy's Weapon: Attacks

If an opponent's weapon is made unusable, his skill with it is irrelevant.

Breaking (p. B401): Unlike disarming, breaking can be done with any weapon, even a ranged one – the to-hit procedure is the same, but instead of a Quick Contest on a successful hit, simply roll damage against the weapon (damage to inanimate objects is explained on pp. B483-484). Spells such as Shatter (***Magic,*** pp. 116-117), Explode (***Magic,*** p. 118), and Disintegrate (***Magic,*** p. 120) accomplish similar results.

Disarming (pp. B400-401): Any weapon that can parry (including an unarmed attack) can be used to knock an enemy's weapon out of his hand, as detailed on pp. B400-401. The Disarming technique (p. B230) can improve the chance of successfully getting rid of the weapon, while the Retain Weapon technique (p. B232) can help the target keep a grip on it.

Ensnaring Weapons (pp. B410-411): Certain ensnaring weapons can disarm opponents (e.g., bolas), or entangle and immobilize them (e.g., lariats and nets).

Grabbing (p. B370): By rolling against DX or a grappling skill, at the usual penalty for attacking the hand hit location, someone can attempt to seize an enemy's weapon. On following turns, a Regular Contest of ST determines if the weapon is taken away (the attacker wins), or the hold is lost entirely (the target wins). Using Telekinesis (p. B92) to snatch a weapon works, too!

Improving Defenses

One of the best ways to increase combat effectiveness is to simply not get hit – dodge out of the path of attacks, parry them, or block them with a shield. When it isn't possible to avoid being hit, the next best thing is to lessen the damage received.

Bonuses to Defense

These actions apply bonuses directly to active defenses.

Acrobatic Dodge (p. B375): With at least one point in Acrobatics skill, someone can, once per turn, make an Acrobatics roll before his Dodge roll. Success gives a bonus to that dodge; failure gives a penalty.

All-Out Defense (Increased Defense) (p. B366): Improves any *one* active defense (Dodge, Parry, or Block) until the following turn.

Cross Parry (***Martial Arts,*** p. 121): Allows two individual weapons to parry together, like a two-handed weapon, using the better of the two parries. This gives a bonus to the attempt, but neither hand can be used to parry again for the rest of the turn.

Defensive Attack (***Martial Arts,*** p. 100): Improved defenses at the cost of inflicting less damage with a successful attack.

Defensive Grip (***Martial Arts,*** pp. 109-111): Gives a melee weapon a bonus to parry attacks from the front hex, but a penalty against attacks from the side hexes. See the description for details on other effects.

Dodge and Drop (p. B377): Similar to a retreat, this option provides a bonus to Dodge against ranged attacks by dropping to the ground while dodging. The downside is that it leaves the dodger prone. See also the variations *Sacrificial Dodge and Drop* and *Diving for Cover*, both on p. B377.

Feverish Defense (p. B357): With this optional rule, a fighter can spend 1 FP to get a bonus to a single active defense roll.

Retreating (pp. B377, B391): Though there are significant restrictions on retreating (see p. 60), it remains one of the best ways to improve defense against a melee attack once per turn. Taking a step backward while using an active defense gives +3 to Dodge or +1 to Block or Parry (or +3 to Parry if using Boxing, Judo, Karate, or any fencing skill) against a single opponent at the moment he attacks. For example, coupling a Retreat (+3) with an All-Out Defense (Increased Defense) (+2) gives a total of +5 to Dodge against a single attack!

Shields (p. B374): In addition to providing a Block score, having a ready shield adds its Defense Bonus to *any* Dodge, Parry, or Block roll against attacks from the front or shield-side hexes. Equipping enemies with a shield may be the easiest way to improve their defenses.

Lowering Damage

Even the best fighters get hit occasionally. There are a few ways to lower the damage taken that everyone can use (as opposed to those granted by advantages such as Damage Resistance and Injury Tolerance). Formidable enemies should have armor strong enough to withstand the PCs' average blows, but not so strong they have no chance of being injured.

Armor (pp. B282, B378): Wearing armor is the most common way to prevent personal harm. The Damage Resistance (DR) of a piece of armor subtracts directly from the damage of a successful attack, so the more DR the better. The biggest drawback to just piling on the armor is weight – high levels of encumbrance lower a fighter's Dodge (as well as Parry and attacks, if using fencing weapons, Judo, or Karate). Also, flexible armor can allow certain types of damage to inflict "blunt trauma," even without penetrating DR (see *Flexible Armor and Blunt Trauma*, p. B379).

The DR of all armor is its cover DR. This is more-or-less the sum of the material's DR and HP, and reflects the de facto DR experienced by those behind the cover. This is greater than the DR the armor itself enjoys, for the same reason that a man behind another man in body armor enjoys more DR than the sap in the armor. Armor DR thus reflects a nonunique combination of the DR of the armor's material and the HP attendant to the armor's weight. Thus:

- Your hard, easily shattered armor gets its DR from high material DR, low HP.
- Your soft, weapon-snagging armor gets its DR from low material DR, high HP.

Since most gamers detest the idea of tracking armor damage, we didn't go into the breakdown in the ***Basic Set*** . . . especially since we'd have to have rules for hole size (overcoming material DR just makes a hole, most of the time).

Cover (pp. B407-408): Taking cover behind objects and terrain with high DR values lowers damage taken, since a successful attack has to first overpenetrate the cover (p. B408). For details on which hit locations are usually exposed, penalties to hit them, etc., see *Cover* (p. B407).

Overcoming Defenses

Facing an opponent with very strong defenses can be difficult. Below are options for mitigating or even completely neutralizing an enemy's active defenses, most of which are cumulative. Experienced fighters will use as many of these as they can to get an edge over their opponents.

Nearly all defense penalties are stackable:

- Feint.
- Deceptive Attack (not cumulative with Riposte).
- Counterattack, Riposte, or Stop Hit [from ***Martial Arts***].
- Hitting your enemy with both parts of a Dual-Weapon Attack (-1).
- Any technique that penalizes specific defenses (e.g., Jump Kick vs. parry).
- Attacking your enemy from the side (-2) or higher ground (-1 to -3).
- Attacking your enemy while he's lying on the ground (-3), kneeling (-2), or sitting (-2).
- Attacking your enemy while he's stunned (-4).

For example, a high-skill, high-Move fighter could feint and win by, say, 4 (-4) on his turn; then parry an enemy blow, setting up a Counterattack; and then on his next turn run around his enemy to the side (-2) and make his Counterattack (-2) as a Deceptive Attack at -6 to hit (-3). This would give his enemy -11 to defend!

The Enemy's Skill: Defenses

The most straightforward way to lower an enemy's defenses is to apply penalties directly to his active defenses, or to the underlying traits they are based on.

All-Out Attack (Feint) and *Feint* (p. B365; ***Martial Arts,*** pp. 100-101): Feints allow a fighter to apply his margin of success in a Quick Contest of skills as a direct penalty to his target's active defense. Note that if a Feint is followed on the next turn by an All-Out Attack (Double), Rapid Strike, etc., the Feint penalty applies to *both* attacks! A shield can also be used to Feint (rolling against Shield skill) after it has been used to attack the target at least once. See *Ranged Feints* in ***Martial Arts*** (p. 121) for feints with ranged weapons.

In particular, Feint (p. B365) and Deceptive Attack (p. B369) exist explicitly to enable high-skill heroes to win fights against mookish foes with ease and to land blows on tough-but-clumsy boss monsters with regularity. Indeed, these rules are the primary reasons why it's worthwhile to keep investing in combat skill.

Attacking From the Sides, Behind, and Above (pp. B390-391, B402): Not attacking from in front of the target is a useful way to impose defense penalties (see p. B385 for a diagram of which hexes are considered front, side, and back). Attacks from the sides give -2 to defense – and if the attack from behind is one the target is unaware of, there's no active defense at all! Fast-moving fighters may start in front of a foe and run around to his side or back hexes (see *Runaround Attacks,* p. B391). Attacks from above may also prevent any active defense roll, or at least impose a penalty (see *Attack From Above,* p. B402).

Beats (***Martial Arts,*** pp. 100-101): A beat requires a Feint maneuver, but targets only one specific active defense instead of all, and relies on ST instead of DX – see the description for details. If a beat is successful, the margin of victory is applied as a penalty to the targeted defense.

Combat at Different Levels (pp. B402-403): For melee, attacking from higher ground gives the target a defense penalty based on the relative heights involved.

Counterattack (***Martial Arts,*** p. 70): This melee technique allows a roll against the Counterattack level on the turn immediately following a successful active defense against the target. If it succeeds, the target suffers a penalty to active defenses and to any roll to resist a grappling Quick Contest.

Deceptive Attack (p. B369): When the final effective melee skill is 16 or more, employing a Deceptive Attack is rarely a bad idea, since any roll of 17 or 18 is going to fail anyway. Apply -1 to the foe's active defense for every -2 taken this way. See *Prediction Shots* in ***Martial Arts*** (p. 121) for Deceptive Attacks with ranged weapons.

Were I rewriting the ***Basic Set,*** I'd probably state that if your effective combat skill is above 16 after all modifiers, you should reduce it to 16 and apply half the reduction to the enemy's defense. *It's that important.*

Dual-Weapon Attack (p. B417): If both attacks from a Dual-Weapon Attack are directed at a single target, he defends at -1.

Encumbrance (p. B17): The weight of weapons, armor, and other gear a fighter carries relative to his ST can lower his Dodge. It also interferes with such unarmed combat skills as Judo and Karate.

Flails (p. B405): Flails are difficult to defend against, and fencing weapons can't parry them at all unless held in a Defensive Grip (due to their light blades).

Grappling (pp. B370-371; ***Martial Arts,*** pp. 117-119): Successfully grappling an enemy causes him to suffer -4 to DX, which in turn gives -2 to Block and Parry and -1 to Dodge (see *Defense While Grappling* on p. 121 of ***Martial Arts***). He's unable to step or change posture, meaning he can't retreat or use Acrobatic Dodge. If the grapple is to a limb, that limb can't block or parry. ***Martial Arts*** and its ***Technical Grappling*** supplement add numerous additional grappling options. ***GURPS*** newcomers often overlook grappling, but it can be devastating when understood and used correctly. A foe that is pinned (p. B370) cannot even use active defenses until he breaks free! All but the weakest of enemies should have at least some grappling skills for resisting the PCs.

Taking combat to the clinch or to the ground is meant to be a high risk/high reward option in ***GURPS.***

The risk is that your enemy can preempt your sweep, shoot, etc. using an armed parry or the Aggressive Parry technique. This will hurt you, as there's no defense against the damage. Even if you grab your opponent, he might beat you in the ensuing takedown and send you down, or sprawl and end up on top of you. The full details are in ***Martial Arts,*** but let's just say that getting position isn't easy.

The reward is that once you do get position, shaking you off is tough. Just about the only way for your foe to do that reliably is to have considerably more ST and grappling skill than you. If you outweigh your rival (more ST) or have better training (more skill, improved techniques, and/or certain special perks), then he has a problem. If you have both edges, then he's going to end up choked, mangled, or pinned. Again, ***Martial Arts*** is the go-to book for details.

All of the above is by design. To avoid horrible fates in close, don't create a sloppy, overspecialized warrior. You'll want the following.

- Good unarmed grappling skills: Judo, Sumo Wrestling, or Wrestling. If you can afford two, buy 'em!
- Decent ST and/or enough Sumo Wrestling or Wrestling to merit a ST bonus.
- If you are strong, the Power Grappling perk.
- A weapon, along with sufficient skill to use it well even at -4 to DX – possibly with the Armed Grapple and Close Combat techniques.
- Unarmed striking skills, preferably with a few of Aggressive Parry, Elbow Strike, Head Butt, and Knee Strike above default.

You cannot expect to make a low-ST, pure-striking character and have him survive. In mixed combat – and all combat in a generic game tends to be mixed – you need some ST and grappling ability or you're going to run into problems the first time you battle a more balanced foe.

Also note that, in ***GURPS,*** each fighter is responsible for his own grapple. Grapples are not egalitarian or reflexive. While the real-world situation is overwhelmingly that as soon as A grapples B, B grapples A right back, ***GURPS*** doesn't force you to do this. For all intents and purposes, if A grapples B and B doesn't grapple back, A has position, is in control, and is assumed to have any of several holds that, while not fight-ending submissions, are definitely advantageous.

Thus, until B grapples back, A has every advantage over B. In particular, A has *no* penalties, and can in fact use Knee Strike more effectively and escalate his grapple into an attempt at a takedown, pin, lock, etc.; his sole difficulty is that he must relinquish his grapple to use his hands or to retreat. Whereas B is at -4 to DX; at -2 to Block or Parry, and at -1 to Dodge; can't attack or defend with a grappled limb; can't retreat or use Acrobatic Dodge; and gets no special treatment when throwing a Knee Strike or trying a grappling move.

Once B grapples back, A and B both can use Knee Strike more effectively; try to initiate a takedown, pin, lock, etc.; have -4 to DX; and suffer -2 to Block or Parry, and -1 to Dodge. Neither can attack or defend with a grappled limb, or retreat or use Acrobatic Dodge.

Consequently, it's to your advantage to be the one who grapples first. By initiating, you create a situation where your foe is at a penalty to return the favor. If he isn't very skilled, you can gain control early and dominate the fight. If he's skilled enough to absorb a -4, though, or just willing to make an All-Out Attack, then this advantage is only momentary. If he insists on not grappling back – well, that's his problem.

Knockback and *Shove* (pp. B372, B378): Yet another tactic against a foe with high defenses is to use a shove or other attack that inflicts knockback. Someone suffering knockback may fall prone, and will then experience the usual penalty to all active defenses.

Posture (p. B551): Defending from a posture other than standing or crouching imposes penalties. Remember that it's possible to be knocked prone by a shove (p. B372), knockback (p. B378), takedown (p. B370), or Judo throw (p. B203).

Retreating (p. B377): Retreating is great when defending, allowing backward movement of one step and giving a bonus to active defense. However, it does have numerous restrictions that the GM should be aware of to curtail overuse: a fighter can only retreat once per turn; must have an "open" hex behind him to move into; and can't retreat if kneeling, sitting, grappling (or being grappled), or stunned, or after sprinting the previous turn. Also, remember that most combats do not take place on an infinite smooth plain – there are usually all manner of terrain and obstacles on the battlefield (hydrants, curbs, debris, telephone poles, buildings, cars, other fighters, etc.) that restrict the ability to retreat turn after turn. (Using a hex map makes it easier to keep track of exactly where these sorts of things are in relation to the fighters.)

You can certainly make people more circumspect about overusing retreats by placing some "surprises" on the field that only appear on the GM's map, because there's no way to detect them unless you drop out of combat time and start poking around carefully. Examples of surprises include covered pits, land mines, and invisible spell effects. Numbered hexes are good for keeping track of this stuff. The second or third time a PC retreats and goes down a hole ("You dodge the 1d impaling sword thrust easily. However, you take 1d impaling from the spiked pit, and now everybody can take easy shots at your head."), people will start valuing the terra firma they know a lot more.

Another one I often use in my campaign is the "defensive position": The PCs have a doorway, narrow gap between trucks, small platform, etc. that funnels a superior number of foes into a manageable front and/or gives the PCs a height advantage. They're welcome to retreat. If they do, though, the enemies who haven't yet acted are free to boil in and negate, even take over the position. Now the PCs are flanked and in trouble. The second or third time I did that, the players decided that a wounded point man was better than having him take +3 to Dodge and not be wounded.

And yet another one is the "known boundary": The PCs are at a cliff edge, on a pier jutting over water (or a dead drop, for an airship!), backed up against a lava pit, or whatever. All the PCs and players know that the boundary is there. Retreating means dire injury, even death.

The latter two are completely open and honest – no secret maps, no accusations of the GM moving hidden obstacles around – and work well even for the most adversarial gaming groups. All three options are entirely fitting for heroic combat scenarios. Indeed, all three are realistic. Real-world defenses are normally static unless you control the ground behind you and can safely defend in depth.

Riposte (***Martial Arts,*** pp. 124-125): A Riposte is similar to a Deceptive Attack, except it reduces Parry, not the attacking melee skill. On the turn following a successful parry, apply the amount by which the Parry was reduced as a penalty to one of the target's active defenses.

Ruses (***Martial Arts,*** p. 101): A ruse requires a Feint maneuver, and permits the use of IQ in the resulting Quick Contest. The target can use his normal DX-based skill roll, a Per-based skill roll, or his Tactics skill. If the ruse is successful, the margin of victory is applied as a penalty to the target's active defense.

The entire goal of Beats and Ruses *is not* to rob your target of the benefit of his DX. In fact, his scores and choice of scores are *totally irrelevant* to the question. The entire goal of Beats and Ruses is to let *you* compensate for *your* low DX. If your foe is resisting with DX-based Broadsword-15, and you're a big ogre with ST 20, DX 11, and Broadsword-12, or a wizard with IQ 16, DX 8, and Broadsword-10, then you're clearly better off trying a Beat at 21 vs. 15 or a Ruse at 18 vs. 15, respectively, than a Feint at 12 vs. 15 or 10 vs. 15. That's what these rules are for. They address cases where the fighter doing the tricky move has scores better than DX, and look only at those scores relative to his DX. The other fighter's scores aren't even important.

Put another way, these are options for "big" fighters or "smart" fighters, to keep them competitive despite low DX. They serve that purpose. These options don't exist to blindside DX-based opponents of such fighters, who have paid points for their DX and who can rightfully expect it to matter. If anything, these options are unusually generous to those who opted not to buy the score that the rules say you need to be a good fighter. They aren't unusually restrictive at all.

Stop Hits (***Martial Arts,*** p. 108): A Stop Hit is a special case of the Wait maneuver, "to attack my enemy as he attacks." It may give an active defense penalty to both, one, or none of the fighters – see the description for details.

Stun (p. B420): Someone suffering stun is -4 to all active defenses and can't retreat. Common ways to inflict stun are critical hits and anything requiring a roll to avoid knockdown and stunning (such as major wounds, crippling injury, and attacks to the head or vitals inflicting enough injury to cause a shock penalty). A fighter trapped in a state of perpetual stun is in trouble!

Were I rewriting the ***Basic Set,*** *I'd probably state that if your effective combat skill is above 16 after all modifiers, you should reduce it to 16 and apply half the reduction to the enemy's defense.* ***It's that important.***

– Kromm

Wounding (p. B419): Once a combatant is at less than 1/3 HP, his Dodge is halved (round up).

The Enemy's Weapon: Defenses

If the opponent's defense is a very high Parry with a light weapon, an attacker with a weapon that is at least three times heavier may break his weapon (see *Parrying Heavy Weapons*, p. B376). Furthermore, the suggestions under *The Enemy's Weapon: Attacks* (p. 57) can just as easily be used to rid a foe of his weapon's defenses as his weapon's attacks.

Defenses and Multiple Attackers

Even high-skill warriors have problems defending against more than one attacker at a time. Switching combat from one vs. one to one vs. two, or even one vs. three, makes a *big* difference. Fighting more than three opponents at once requires legendary fighting skills!

As noted under *Attacking From the Sides, Behind, and Above* (p. 58), attacks from the sides and rear give penalties to active defenses, and multiple attackers will find it easier to launch attacks from those hexes. The biggest challenge of fighting more than one enemy is keeping up with the number of attacks – each active defense can only be used so many times per turn before incurring penalties. If actually surrounded, the results are even worse.

The effects of being surrounded are built into the combat system. They don't so often take the form of actual bonuses for the attacker as of penalties and/or limited options for the defender. Specifically:

- You'll quickly run out of active defenses, because you can only block once (p. B375) and are at a penalty if you parry more than once (p. B376).
- At least one of your foes will be in your back hex, and you'll have no active defense at all against his attacks. See p. B391.
- At least two of your foes will be in your side hexes. You'll defend against their attacks at -2, and you'll be unable to block/parry with your left (right) hand against the foe on your right (left) side. See p. B390. Furthermore, your shield's DB will only help against the attacker on your shield side (p. B287).
- Your remaining three foes will be in your front hexes. You can defend against them normally, but you cannot retreat, because there are people occupying all the hexes into which you could retreat. See p. B391.
- If your opponents decide to dogpile on you in close combat, they'll get bonuses to DX and ST. See p. B392.

All-Out Defense (Double Defense) (p. B366): This lets the combatant choose a second, *different* active defense against an attack if the first active defense fails. Note that if parrying with one hand, a parry with the other hand *is* a different defense (allowing for two parry attempts against the same attack, one with each hand).

Double Defense doesn't change how many defenses you can attempt in total – it increases the number of defenses you can attempt against each attack. It makes the most sense to lead with a dodge, because that's "free" and if it works, you get to save your precious block and parries (and if it doesn't work, you can fall back on one of these). Probably, we could have called it "All-Out Defense (Dodge First!)" and mostly been correct, but there will be fighters for whom block-then-parry, parry-then-block, parry left-then-parry right, parry-then-Blink spell, etc. will be preferable.

Blocks per Turn (p. B375; ***Martial Arts,*** p. 123): Blocks are usually restricted to one attempt per turn (though see the optional *Multiple Blocks* on p. 123 of ***Martial Arts***).

Dodges per Turn (pp. B374-375; ***Martial Arts,*** p. 123): Dodge is the only active defense to allow a roll against every attack you're aware of without penalty (or at a cumulative -1 per dodge beyond the first, if using the optional rule *Limiting Multiple Dodges* on p. 123 of ***Martial Arts***). See also *Restricted Dodge Against Firearms* in ***Martial Arts*** (p. 123).

Fencing Weapons (pp. B208, B376): Using a fencing weapon with an appropriate skill (Main-Gauche, Rapier, Saber, Smallsword) reduces the penalty for multiple parries in a single turn (even further with the advantages Trained by a Master or Weapon Master). Penalties only apply if the *same hand* parries more than once in a turn; the first parry for each hand has no modifiers (unless it is the "off" hand, in which case it parries at the usual -2).

Parries per Turn (p. B376): Using the *same* (ready) weapon or hand to parry multiple attacks in a turn is at a cumulative -4 per attempt (or -2 with a fencing weapon, or with Trained by a Master or Weapon Master; or -1 with both). There is a -2 penalty for weapon or unskilled, unarmed parries using the "off" hand (without the Ambidexterity advantage).

Two-Handed Weapons (***Martial Arts,*** p. 123): For a ready weapon wielded with two hands (using Polearm, Spear, Staff, or Two-Handed Sword skill), and at least two yards long, the penalty for multiple parries in a turn may be reduced by half. Such weapons may also defend against a Dual-Weapon Attack with a single parry, at -1.

Chapter Seven

Example of Running the Adventure

The GM (Marcus) has structured his campaign and the game world to be something fun for himself and all the players. He helped the players create PCs well-equipped for exploring this world and surviving its challenges (see Chapter 2). He designed a basic adventure to introduce them all to the campaign world (see Chapter 4). Now, it's time to actually run the adventure!

It would take a separate book to transcribe the entirety of an RPG group's actual play session. This chapter instead focuses on just a few key encounters.

The adventurers are detailed on pp. 19-21. Anne is Beldin, a town guard; Josh is Jax, an archer; and Peter is Rory, a charismatic "people person."

Being the GM: Example

Marcus has read all of the important resources listed in Chapter 5 – many of them more than once. He also downloaded and printed out three copies of the ***GURPS Combat Cards*** for his players, filled in a GM Control Sheet with all the relevant information, and has a ***GURPS GM's Screen*** on hand with the most common tables and rules.

Before the Session: Example

Be Prepared: The game session is at Marcus' house, so before the players start arriving, he makes sure the room where they're playing is well-lit and prepared. At his seat are the ***GURPS*** books he owns, the ***GURPS GM's Screen***, copies of the adventure and the three characters, a completed Campaign Planning Form and GM Control Sheet, three decks of ***GURPS Combat Cards***, pencils, paper, and a bunch of dice.

Socialize: Josh arrives first, and he and Marcus chat about the latest computer game they're both playing. Anne and Peter arrive later, and everyone spends some time catching up on the week, work, the latest movies, etc. before they dive in.

Recap: This is the first session, so there's nothing to recap.

Answer Questions: Marcus asks if there are any questions. There are a couple of minor ones, but nothing too involved.

Josh: Just to clarify – do I have to roll *under* my effective skill to succeed at something, or *on or under*?

Marcus: If your effective skill at something is, say, 14, you need to roll a 14 or less.

Anne: I can't remember if my character Beldin is still in the Kharston town guard, now, or if he used to be a town guard.

Marcus: [Checks his notes.] You decided Beldin was in the town guard until about a week ago, when he took a leave of absence in preparation for leaving town with his friends.

Relax and Have Fun: Marcus takes a mental pause, relaxes, and – they're off!

During the Session: Example

Marcus glances once more at his notes as he decides how he wants to open the adventure.

Start With Some Action

The first encounter is for the party to be interviewed by a merchant named Tignis for a possible job. Marcus suddenly realizes he'd rather start things off with a bit more urgency, to grab the group's attention and pull them immediately into the game. His choices are limited by the fact that the game is starting in a small town, with inexperienced PCs, but he wants to throw *some* kind of initial conflict in the party's way.

So, as they walk through the cluster of storehouses to get to Tignis', a group of four young ruffians begins harassing them. Marcus decides they are from a merchant house at odds with Rory's father, and recognize Rory as his son.

Taunts and verbal jeers escalate (despite Rory's attempts at Diplomacy and Fast-Talk), and one of the ruffians throws a handful of mud at Rory, who fails his Dodge roll. The thrown wet mud soaks his white shirt, and a brawl ensues.

Marcus just assumes the ruffians all have attributes of 10, with a Brawling skill of 11, wear normal clothing with no appreciable DR, favor All-Out Attacks, and get taken out of the fight as soon as their HP reaches 0 (though they'll likely flee long before that). The party handily wins this fight in just a few seconds, sending their attackers scurrying, but now they are all covered in mud and not presentable for a job meeting.

Rory's home is closest, so the PCs race there, quickly change clothes, and run back to see Tignis. Marcus explains that Beldin and Jax both have a Basic Move higher than Rory's, so they'll need to slow and run at his speed to all arrive together. He describes the mad dash through town, with a few easy DX rolls thrown in for avoiding obstacles. The party arrives at Tignis' warehouse 20 minutes late.

Marcus (as Tignis): Well, well, look who has finally darkened my door. Perhaps I'll not only hire ye, but throw in a bonus for such punctuality? Be gone. I've no use for guards who can't tell where the sun lies in the sky!

Peter would rather not admit to Tignis what really happened, as it doesn't show the party in the most professional light, so he decides to spin a more favorable tale.

Peter (as Rory): Madame Tignis, our deepest regrets for keeping you waiting. No doubt your time is most valuable. But we were tasked this morning with keeping watch over one of my father's recent imports of Ladavian sweet-fruits, and discovered that rats had begun to feast on them. As much as we wanted to be prompt for our meeting with you, we could not in good conscience leave my father's goods to be ruined by vermin. [Out of character, Peter states what wants he to do.] Marcus, I'd like to try an Influence roll on Tignis, using my Diplomacy skill.

Influence rolls are made against (Influence skill + reaction modifier). Rory's normal reaction modifier is +5 (+1 for Attractive, +2 for Charisma, and +2 for Voice), but Voice is *already* factored into his Diplomacy skill of 14, so he just uses the +3 from his Appearance and Charisma. His effective skill is 17, in a Quick Contest against Tignis' Will of 12.

Peter rolls 11 on 3d, for a margin of success of 6 (skill of 17 - roll of 11). Marcus rolls 9 on 3d, for a margin of success of 3 (skill of 12 - roll of 9). Rory wins the Quick Contest by 3 (the difference between the two margins of success).

Marcus: Tignis definitely seems annoyed that you were late for your appointment, but she's also pleased by your loyalty while guarding the fruit. After pondering a moment, she invites you all into the back room of the warehouse.

Pay Attention to the Players

The game progresses well from that first encounter. Tignis offers the job of finding a safe route to Mossenway to the PCs, who unanimously accept. Rory successfully talks her up to the fair wage of $350 per scout, and they plan to leave the following morning.

While walking back to their homes, they spend some time chatting. One of the things they discuss is why Tignis agreed to interview them in the first place. Rory maintains it was simply a favor to his father, but Beldin believes it something more sinister – he thinks Willem "must have some dirt" on Tignis, and used that as leverage. Marcus had originally written the interview as just a pleasantry between colleagues, but decides it might be more interesting if Tignis really does have a few secrets to hide, secrets that Rory's father Willem knows about. He marks this in his notes for later.

Let the Players Have Fun

The PCs pick up their supplies from Tignis in the morning and set out for Mossenway. As they travel, the players role-play out some of their character conversations, so Marcus just lets them enjoy themselves. Many of these conversations flesh out their histories and personalities, and Marcus takes more notes.

Always Have an Encounter Ready

All the while as they travel, Marcus keeps in mind the "Trapped Wolf" encounter, in case things start to drag. The pace seems good for everyone, though, and they continue to make their way toward Mossenway. Over the course of a few in-game days, the party experiences a brief rain shower, a large tree with a trunk that looks like a face, and a large, frond-covered lake (which they camp next to one night).

Include Everyone

Marcus notices that Peter's adventurer, Rory, has been the focus of more situations than the others in the group. It was Rory who talked Tignis into giving them a job interview after they were late; he is also the one making the nightly Survival rolls, and the one trying to map as they go (since he has the highest IQ, and the highest Cartography default). Marcus makes a conscious effort to give Beldin and Jax more to do.

Tailor to the Adventurers

As the next day of travel begins, Marcus mentions to Jax that the area they are riding through is home to many quail. Jax begins to ride with his bow strung, and eventually bags a nice fat quail with an impressive bow shot from almost 50 yards away. That night, the party thoroughly enjoys their break from bland trail rations.

Marcus decides to change the wolf in the "Trapped Wolf" encounter from being sympathetic and in need of rescue to being hostile and threatening. As they break camp in the morning, Beldin notices a wolf just a few yards away, intently staring at him. It is gaunt, haggard, half-crazed with hunger, possibly even diseased – Beldin has just enough time to shout a warning to the others and Fast-Draw his sword before it's upon him.

The battle is vicious but over in just a few seconds. The wolf lies bleeding out on the ground, and Beldin has suffered 2 HP of injury from a deep bite to his calf. While Rory grabs the equivalent of a first aid kit from their gear, Beldin tries to stop his own bleeding with a torn strip of his shirt. (Marcus quickly reviews the rules for First Aid on p. B424.) This takes one minute. Beldin's First Aid skill is 10, at -2 for improvised equipment (p. B345), giving him an effective skill of 8. Anne rolls a 13, failing by 5, and is unable to stop the bleeding. Marcus explains this as the awkwardness of Beldin trying to work on his own wound.

Rory arrives with clean bandages and a plant poultice common to the local area. His First Aid skill is 14, with no penalties (he is using basic equipment). Peter first rolls to stop the bleeding, and succeeds by 3 with a roll of 11 – Beldin's wound stops bleeding, and he receives 1 HP back (so he is now only down by 1). This also takes one minute. Rory then dresses the wound and tends to Beldin for 30 minutes more, after which he makes another First Aid roll. Peter succeeds again, with a roll of 9, allowing him to restore 1d-3 HP to Beldin. Peter rolls a 5 on 1d, restoring a total of 2 HP. This includes the 1 HP already recovered, so Beldin only receives another 1 HP, but that's enough to bring him back to full health.

Marcus isn't sure whether to pursue possible disease or infection from this wound, for later story hooks. He has Anne make a roll against Beldin's HT of 13, just in case – she rolls an 8 on 3d, succeeding by 5. Marcus figures Beldin will be fine.

Encounter: Bandit Toll Road

On the fifth day, the party stops to eat a quick lunch as usual, then continues traveling on foot to give the horses a rest. They follow a bend in the trail and see three unsavory figures and two horses just ahead (Kalee and two bandit thugs, detailed in the NPCs section of the adventure; see pp. 32-33). Though originally standing in the road, the three step a few feet to the side as the party approaches. Unsure of who they are, and not wanting to appear hostile by mounting, the PCs continue walking slowly toward the figures. Beldin quietly slips his shield off of his horse and readies it as they approach.

Rory and Kalee trade a curt "good day" as the two groups come abreast. All three of the bandits appear wary, and have their hands resting near their sword hilts, but it looks as though they plan to let the PCs pass. In this tense situation, Marcus asks Anne for a roll against Beldin's Bad Temper self-control of 12. She rolls 3d and fails with a 14. Beldin is compelled to lash out.

Anne (as Beldin): This is *not* your road, you foul-smelling dung heaps!

The bandits respond immediately and move to engage – combat begins! First, Marcus notes the turn sequence (p. B363) on his GM Control Sheet, based on the Basic Speed of all participants. Rory and the bandit thugs are tied for both Basic Speed and DX, so Marcus rolls 1d to determine who goes first, odd numbers for the bandits, even numbers for Rory. He rolls 4, so Rory goes before the thugs. The turn sequence is: Jax (Basic Speed 6.25, DX 14), Beldin (Basic Speed 6.25, DX 12), Kalee (Basic Speed 5.75), Rory (Basic Speed 5.50, DX 11), and Bandit Thugs (Basic Speed 5.50, DX 11).

The two groups begin combat at only four yards apart. Jax goes first and chooses a Ready maneuver to draw his shortsword from its sheath. Beldin acts next and tries to Fast-Draw his broadsword – his Fast-Draw (Sword) skill is 12, and Anne rolls a 10 on 3d, so the sword is now in his hand. He chooses a Move and Attack maneuver, and attempts a shield rush (p. B372) against Kalee, the enemy wearing the best armor.

Below is a detailed, turn-by-turn example of the fight between Beldin and Kalee. Note that while their fight is taking place, similar fights between Jax and a bandit thug, and Rory and a bandit thug, are also occurring, with each player declaring and resolving their own character's maneuvers as their turn in the sequence comes up.

The character stats for both fighters are found earlier in this supplement (Beldin is on pp. 19-20; Kalee is on p. 33).

Beldin, Turn 1: Beldin chooses the Move and Attack maneuver, and attempts a shield rush (p. B372) against Kalee. He runs four yards, and Anne rolls 3d against his Shield skill of 14, succeeding with an 8. Marcus chooses to have Kalee parry, and rolls 3d against her Parry of 11, failing with a 13.

The formula for slam damage is (HP × velocity) / 100. For Beldin, this equates to (14 × 4) / 100 = 0.56. According to p. B371, fractions above 0.50 are treated as 1d-1 damage; Anne rolls 1d-1 and gets a total of 3 (the die roll is 4). Because this is a shield rush, Beldin adds the DB of his medium shield, which is 2, to the roll, for a final damage result of 5.

Kalee's slam damage to Beldin equates to (13 × 4) / 100 = 0.52, which is also 1d-1 damage. Marcus rolls 1d-1 and gets a total of 3 (this die roll is also 4).

Applying Beldin's damage of 5 to Kalee's torso, minus her DR of 2, means Kalee takes 3 points of crushing damage. Marcus reduces her HP from 13 to 10. Applying Kalee's damage of 3 to Beldin's shield, minus its DR of 7, means Beldin's shield takes no damage (see the *Shield Table*, p. B287).

Because Beldin's damage roll was more than Kalee's, Kalee must roll against her DX to remain standing. Marcus rolls 3d against her DX of 11, succeeding with a 9.

Marcus: Beldin charges at the female warrior, shield raised, and slams into her with a loud thwack of wood on leather. She resolutely holds her ground, and doesn't fall, but does seem wounded. She grits her teeth and raises her sword to attack.

Kalee, Turn 1: Kalee has been wounded for 3 points of damage, but because she has the High Pain Threshold advantage, she does not suffer the -3 from shock. She chooses the Attack maneuver, and attempts a cutting attack with her broadsword to Beldin's neck (base Broadsword skill of 15, -5 to hit the neck).

Marcus rolls 3d against her effective skill of 10, and succeeds with a 10. Anne then rolls 3d against Beldin's Block of 13 (3 + half Shield skill of 14 = 10, +1 for Combat Reflexes, +2 for shield's DB of 2, total of 10 + 1 + 2 = 13), and succeeds with a 7.

Marcus: The ruffian swings smoothly for Beldin's throat, but he manages to get his shield up just in time to intercept the blade.

Rory then takes his first turn, followed by each of the bandit thugs. By that point, all combatants have completed their first turn. Jax then takes his second, followed by Beldin.

Beldin, Turn 2: Beldin chooses the Attack maneuver, and attempts a cutting attack with his broadsword to Kalee's weapon arm (-2 to hit). Anne rolls against Beldin's effective skill of 12 (base Broadsword skill of 14, -2 for targeting the arm), and succeeds with an 11. Marcus rolls against Kalee's Parry of 11 and succeeds with a 10.

Marcus: Beldin slashes at his foe's leading arm, but she deftly knocks his blade aside with her own.

Kalee, Turn 2: Kalee chooses the Feint maneuver, and makes a Quick Contest between her Broadsword skill of 15 and Beldin's best melee weapon or unarmed skill, which is a Broadsword skill of 14. Marcus rolls for Kalee, and succeeds by 4 with a roll of 11. Anne rolls for Beldin, and succeeds by 2 with a roll of 12. Kalee wins the Quick Contest by a margin of 2 (her margin of success of 4, minus Beldin's margin of success of 2), and will apply -2 to Beldin's defense next turn.

Marcus: The bandit waves her sword erratically, trying to open a hole in Beldin's defense.

Many GMs don't tell their players when an enemy is feinting, but Marcus feels the whole group is still learning the system and can benefit from following along.

Rory takes his second turn, followed by each of the bandit thugs, then Jax takes his third turn.

Beldin, Turn 3: Beldin again chooses the Attack maneuver, this time spending 2 FP on a Flurry of Blows (p. B357) to use Rapid Strike (p. B370) for two attacks, each at -3 to hit instead of the usual -6. Anne lowers his FP from 13 to 11, then rolls twice against his effective skill of 11 (base skill of 14, with -3 for Rapid Strike); she succeeds once with an 8, and fails once with a 12. Marcus rolls against Kalee's Parry of 11, and succeeds with a 9.

Marcus: Beldin launches two lightning-fast strikes with his sword. The first blow misses. The second almost hits its mark, but is again parried by the bandit's experienced blade.

Kalee, Turn 3: Kalee chooses the Attack maneuver, and attempts a thrusting attack to Beldin's vitals hit location (-3 to hit, from her base Broadsword skill of 15). Marcus rolls 3d against her effective skill of 12, and succeeds with a 9. Anne has Beldin retreat, adding a +1 to his defense, and spends 1 FP for an additional +2 from Feverish Defense (p. B357), giving Beldin an effective Block of 14 (base Block of 13, +1 for retreat, +2 for Feverish Defense, -2 for Kalee's successful Feint last turn). She rolls and fails, with a 15!

Marcus rolls Kalee's broadsword damage of 1d+2, and gets a total of 4 (the die roll is 2). Applying Kalee's damage of 4 to Beldin's torso, minus his DR of 2, means 2 points of impaling damage penetrate Beldin's armor. Because of the vitals hit location, impaling damage is multiplied by ×3, doing a total of 6 points of damage to Beldin. Anne reduces Beldin's HP from 14 to 8 (and his FP from 11 to 10, for the Feverish Defense). Because this is injury to the vitals, she also makes a roll against his effective HT of 16 (HT 13, +3 from High Pain Threshold), to avoid knockdown and stunning (p. B420). She succeeds with an 11.

Marcus: The bandit lunges wickedly at Beldin, trying to skewer him right through the chest. Her blade penetrates his armor and plunges deeply into his body. Beldin is seriously wounded. The only reason he's still alive is because he leapt backward as the bandit attacked!

Rory then takes his third turn, as do each of the bandit thugs, and Jax takes his fourth.

Sometimes, it really is as simple as just giving the players a chance to do what they want to do.

Beldin, Turn 4: That last wound was severe and could have been much worse if Marcus hadn't rolled so low for damage. Beldin also has the High Pain Threshold advantage, so he does not suffer the maximum shock penalty of -4 from the 6-point wound he received. Anne decides to take a *big* risk, and chooses the All-Out Attack (Determined) maneuver (+4 to hit), attempting a cutting attack with Beldin's broadsword to Kalee's neck (-5 to hit). Anne rolls against Beldin's effective skill of 13 (base Broadsword skill of 14, +4 for All-Out Attack (Determined), -5 for neck hit location), and succeeds with a 10. Marcus rolls against Kalee's Parry of 11, and fails with a 12.

At this point, Marcus considers using Kalee's Luck to roll two more Parry attempts and take the best one. She's already come close to killing Beldin, though, and Marcus is concerned he may have made Kalee just a bit too tough for new adventurers. He chooses to ignore her Luck.

Anne rolls Beldin's broadsword damage of 2d+1 and gets a total of 9 points of cutting damage applied to Kalee's neck. Because of the neck hit location, cutting damage is multiplied by ×2, doing a total of 18 points of damage to Kalee. Marcus reduces Kalee's HP from 10 to -8. Normally, Kalee would need to make an immediate HT roll to remain conscious (as she is below 0 HP), then another against knockdown and stunning from such a major wound (p. B420). Marcus feels it's more dramatically appropriate to just have her surrender, and then fall unconscious from her injuries.

Marcus: Beldin slashes desperately at the female warrior, and his sword rips a jagged gash across her throat. Blood flows freely down the front of her armor – she drops her sword and collapses to her knees. One hand clutches her wound, the other stretches forward, as if in surrender, before she falls unconscious. Upon seeing this, the other two bandits drop their swords and begin to flee.

The party decides to let the two bandits run away, and Rory spends time bandaging Kalee's wounds. Rory also tends to Beldin – Rory and Jax received only minor injuries.

After some discussion, the party decides to leave Kalee where she is, with one of the horses, assuming that if she regains consciousness she will be able to ride somewhere for further assistance. They load the other horse with the swords the bandits left behind and Kalee's few possessions, and take it with them as they continue.

Try New Things

Later that day, long after the battle against the bandits, the party encounters a lone farmer driving a small cart in the opposite direction. Marcus feels like all of his NPCs have kind of the exact same voice and accent, so he really hams it up with this one, giving him a very deep, slow voice. The farmer says he is heading toward Hemmel, and seems a friendly sort. Jax asks him if he knows how to get to Mossenway, and the farmer happily gives some vague directions about "that way" (though he's at least pointing in the direction the PCs are heading). The adventurers converse a bit with the farmer before continuing on their way.

End With a Cliffhanger

With just a short time left to continue playing, the party makes camp that night as they always have. After some late supper, they start laying down their bed rolls. Marcus makes a Common Sense roll against Rory's IQ of 13 and succeeds with an 11. He suggests to Peter that, given the events of the day, and the fact that they know bandits are active in the area, they may want to post a watch.

The group decides that Rory will stay up late, Jax will get up early, and Beldin will take the middle watch. An hour or so before dawn, while Jax is on guard, Marcus asks Josh for a roll against Jax's Perception of 10. He succeeds with a 10.

Marcus: Jax, as you're sitting by the low fire, you notice what you think is a human-sized shadow moving around in the trees just outside of the firelight. What do you do?

Josh (as Jax): I strung my bow when I started the watch, right?

Marcus: Sure did, I remember you saying that.

Josh (as Jax): I ready my bow and shout, "Wake up! Wake up!" as loud as I can.

Marcus: Just as you do that, men begin charging toward the camp. First, you see only a couple, then three, then maybe even more. One of them is bolting right for you, a broadsword poised over his head. He's screaming, "Get them!" . . . and that's where we'll pick up next time.

After the Session: Example

Once the adventure has come to a good stopping point, post-session activities can happen.

Give Out Rewards

The PCs are making good progress, but they haven't quite reached Mossenway, so there isn't much in the way of material rewards just yet. They do have the possessions they took from Kalee, and the bandit's horse. For character points, Marcus awards each player three – they all played true to character, made a solid effort toward finding a route to Mossenway, and seemed to have a great time.

Time Use Sheet

The next game session will be picking up right where this one left off, so there's no need for a Time Use Sheet.

Ask for Feedback and Suggestions

While folks are packing up their gaming stuff, Marcus asks everyone how they thought the game went. Josh says he really enjoyed his first game and is looking forward to the next, but felt a little lost about some of the rules, especially during combat. Marcus tells him not to worry, that he'll get more experienced every time they play, and that he can always ask questions about anything he doesn't understand.

Peter also enjoyed himself, especially at the beginning when Rory was instrumental in getting the party the job from Tignis, both at making sure they got the interview and during the interview itself.

Anne says she really likes these characters and thinks they work well together. The adventure was a little "basic" for her taste, but she's confident the adventures the PCs find themselves on will expand and grow in complexity as they continue. Her only suggestion is to try some soft background music as they play.

Try to Improve

Marcus makes a note to remember background music for the next game. He also writes down Anne's remark about the simplicity of the adventure, and starts thinking of ways to add more adventure hooks in Mossenway, and on the road back to Kharston, to give the players more choices.

Record the Game Events

The morning after the session, Marcus writes up a quick summary of everything that happened and emails it to the players.

Overall, Marcus is pleased that everyone had such a good time, himself included. This new ***GURPS*** group is off to a solid start, and he's looking forward to running many, many more games in the months and years to come.

Expanded Campaign Planning Form

GURPS Campaign Prospectus

Campaign Name: _____ GM: _____ Creation Date: _____

Genre: _____ Tech Level (TL): _____ TL Exceptions: _____

Power Level: _____ Realism Level: Grittily Realistic / Realistic / Cinematic / Over-the-Top

Campaign Synopsis and Recent Events: _____

_____

Timeline of Significant Historical Events: _____

_____

Currency/$ Value: _____ Currency/$ Value: _____ Currency/$ Value: _____

- Precious Metals? Yes / No
- Paper Money? Yes / No
- E-Money? Yes / No
- Is Slavery Legal? Yes / No

Major Nations (see also *City Stats*)

Name: _____ Capital: _____ Ruler: _____

Population: _____ Search bonus: _____ Terrain: _____

Appearance: _____ Hygiene: _____ Mana: _____ Enchantment: _____

Cultural Familiarity: _____ Language(s): _____

Literacy: _____ TL: _____ Wealth: _____ Status (range): _____

Society/Government: _____ Control Rating (CR): _____ Corruption modifier: _____

Military Resources: _____ Defense Bonus: _____ Notes: _____

Name: _____ Capital: _____ Ruler: _____

Population: _____ Search bonus: _____ Terrain: _____

Appearance: _____ Hygiene: _____ Mana: _____ Enchantment: _____

Cultural Familiarity: _____ Language(s): _____

Literacy: _____ TL: _____ Wealth: _____ Status (range): _____

Society/Government: _____ Control Rating (CR): _____ Corruption modifier: _____

Military Resources: _____ Defense Bonus: _____ Notes: _____

Other Major Planes of Existence

Name: _____ Type: _____ Description: _____

Name: _____ Type: _____ Description: _____

Rules

GURPS Books Used

Title: _____ Notes: _____

Title: _____ Notes: _____

Title: _____ Notes: _____

Optional Rules

Rule: _____ Book: _____ Page: _____

Rule: _____ Book: _____ Page: _____

Rule: _____ Book: _____ Page: _____

House Rules: _____

_____

Starting Points: _____ Disadvantage Limit: _____

Suggested Character Concepts: _____

_____

Character/Racial Templates (Point Total): _____

_____

Attributes

	Min.	Max.	House Rules
ST:	____	____	_____
DX:	____	____	_____
IQ:	____	____	_____
HT:	____	____	_____

Secondary Characteristics

	Relative to base Min.	Max.	House Rules
HP:	_____	____	_____
Will:	_____	____	_____
Per:	_____	____	_____
FP:	_____	____	_____
Basic Speed:	_____	____	_____
Basic Move:	_____	____	_____

Social Traits

Low TL: _____ High TL: _____ Status Levels (Min./Max.): _____

PC Starting Wealth: _____ Wealth Levels (Min./Max.): _____

Cultures (for Cultural Familiarity): _____

Languages: _____

Social Stigma: _____ Social Regard: _____ Other: _____

Rank (Type): _____ Number of Levels: _____ Notes: _____

Rank (Type): _____ Number of Levels: _____ Notes: _____

Advantages

Required Advantages: _____

_____

Allowed Special Advantages: _____

_____

Prohibited Mundane Advantages: _____

_____

Disadvantages

Required Disadvantages: _____

_____

Allowed Special Disadvantages: _____

_____

Prohibited Mundane Disadvantages: _____

_____

Appropriate Contacts

Name	Type	Skill	Effective Level	Reliability	Base Point Cost

Appropriate Contact Groups

Name | Category of Skills | Effective Level | Reliability | Base Point Cost

_____

_____

Appropriate Patrons

Name | Power | Modifiers | Base Point Cost

_____

_____

Appropriate Enemies

Name | Power | Intent | Modifiers | Base Point Cost

_____

_____

Special Skills

Skill: _____ Available Specialties: _____

Skill: _____ Available Specialties: _____

Skill: _____ Advantage Required: _____

Skill: _____ Advantage Required: _____

Available Cinematic Skills: _____

Available Wildcard Skills: _____

Prohibited Mundane Skills: _____

Magic (see also *Magic*)

Average Mana Level:_____ PC Mages Allowed? Y / N Unusual Background Cost:_____ Max. Magery Level: _____

Are Magic Items for Sale? Y / N $ Cost per Energy Point: _____ Notes:_____

Custom Spells: _____

Prohibited Spells: _____

Psionics (see also *Psionic Powers*)

PC Psis Allowed? Y / N Unusual Background Cost: _____ Notes: _____

Power | Max. Talent Level | Allowed Abilities | Prohibited Abilities

_____

_____

Jobs

Name | Description | Prerequisites | Job Roll | Monthly Pay | Wealth Level

_____

_____

_____

Common Equipment (Weapons, Armor, Vehicles, etc.)

_____

_____

INDEX

For specific attributes, skills, advantages, and disadvantages, see the ***Character Trait Index*** *(p. 72).*

Acrobatic Dodge defense option, 57.
Advantages, *attack,* 47-48; *choosing,* 12; *cinematic,* 10; *damage,* 47-48; *defense,* 48; *luck,* 49-51; *magic,* 49-51; *movement,* 49; *physical form,* 49; *psionics,* 49-51; *recovery,* 48; *resistance,* 48; *senses,* 49; *situational awareness,* 49; *size,* 49; *social,* 13-14; *Status,* 13; *training,* 51-52; *useful combat,* 47-52; *Wealth,* 13; *weapon,* 51-52.
Adventures, *after the session,* 38; *before the session,* 37; *cliffhangers,* 38; *creation example,* 32-35; *during the session,* 37; *environments,* 29-30; *example choices,* 17-18; *fun and,* 9, 33; *linear plots,* 25; *maps,* 31; *outlining,* 30-31; *player freedom,* 25-26; *player input,* 25, 37-39; *plot example,* 32; *plots,* 30; *possible outcomes,* 31, 35; *practice matches,* 41-43; *preparation example,* 17-22; *published,* 7; *recording session events,* 39; *resources for creating,* 23; *resources for preparing,* 5-8, 17; *resources for running,* 36; *reward examples,* 66; *rewards,* 31, 38; *role of GM,* 37-39; *roleplaying,* 37; *sandbox gaming,* 25; *session examples,* 62-66; *settings,* 29-30; *social encounters,* 37; *spotlighting individuals,* 25, 38; *starting,* 37; *trying new things,* 38; *see also Campaigns, Combat, Encounters, Nonplayer Characters*.
Aim maneuver, 54.
All-Out Attack maneuvers, 54-56, 58.
All-Out Defense maneuvers, 57, 61.
Archer template, 20.
Arena matches, 43.
Armor, 14, 58; *catalogs,* 7; *damaging,* 30; *encumbrance,* 59; *example characters,* 22; *size and,* 50; *ST and,* 44; *suggested,* 47.
Attacks, *advantages,* 47-48; *area and spreading,* 56; *at different levels,* 58; *improving,* 54-57; *maneuvers,* 54-59; *multiple,* 55-56; *nonfrontal,* 58; *overcoming,* 57; *see also Combat, Defenses.*
Attributes, *levels,* 12; *NPC,* 28; *useful combat,* 43-44.
Bandits, *example encounters,* 34-35; *leader,* 33; *lieutenant,* 33; *thugs,* 33.
Beats, 58.
Beldin, 19-20.
Blocking, 61.
Bryce, 33.
Campaign Planning Form, *example use,* 18; *expanded,* 67-69; *using,* 15.
Campaign Prospectus, 67.
Campaigns, *adventure advice and,* 23; *choosing a genre,* 9-10; *choosing a power level,* 11; *choosing a style,* 10-11; *choosing character traits,* 12-14; *communication with players,* 8-9; *declining suggestions,* 9; *discussing assumptions,* 8-9; *house rules,* 11; *nonhuman races in,* 14; *player input,* 8-9; *realistic or cinematic,* 10-11; *rules-light or rules-heavy,* 11; *running,* 39; *selection examples,* 18; *see also Adventures*.
Cardboard Heroes, 43.
Catalogs, 6, 7.
Character creation, *collaborative,* 16; *decisions,* 15-16; *example,* 18-22; *GM input,* 15, 16; *narrative,* 16; *resources for,* 5; *review example,* 21-22; *reviewing,* 16; *templates,* 16; *vetted,* 16; *see also Advantages, Attributes, Characters, Disadvantages*.
Character Creation Guide, 68-69.
Character points, *as rewards,* 14, 38, 66; *earned,* 14; *limiting spending,* 11-12; *spending,* 14; *see also Character Creation*.
Characters, *as team,* 16; *choosing traits,* 12-14; *concept examples,* 18-21; *concepts,* 15-16; *death,* 11, 40-41; *example,* 19-21; *Fright Checks,* 15; *Influence rolls,* 15; *power level,* 11-12; *reaction rolls,* 15; *social traits*, 13-14; *traits and game mechanics,* 24-25; *warrior,* 54; *see also Advantages, Attributes, Character Creation, Disadvantages, Nonplayer Characters*.
Combat, *attributes,* 43-44; *basic styles,* 46-47, 55; *customizing,* 40-43; *disadvantages,* 52-53; *environment,* 24, 29-30; *equipment and,* 14; *example encounter,* 64-65; *increased chance to hit,* 54; *lethality,* 40; ***Martial Arts*** *and,* 41; *NPC balance,* 26-29, 33; *realism levels,* 41-42; *recommended skills,* 24, 46, 47; *resources for,* 5; *scaling for high-powered games,* 44; *selecting options,* 41-42; *Size Modifiers,* 50; *skills,* 24, 44-47; *special situations,* 24; *speed of play levels,* 41-42; *speeding up,* 43; *techniques,* 47; *ways to influence,* 43-61; *weapons and,* 14, 28, 46-47, 59, 51; *with two weapons,* 46-47, 55, 61; *see also Attacks, Damage, Defenses*.
Combination techniques, 55.
Committed Attack maneuver, 56.
Counterattack technique, 58.
Counters, for visualizing combat, 43.
Cross Parry defense option, 57.
Cross-genre, 10.
Damage, *advantages,* 48; *disadvantages,* 52, 53; *extra,* 56; *lowering,* 58; *shock effects,* 57; *special,* 56-57; *stun effects,* 60; *wounding effects,* 61; *see also Attacks, Combat, Defenses*.
Death, *NPC,* 29; *PC,* 40.
Deceptive Attack combat option, 58, 59.
Defense Resistance (DR), 58; *armor,* 58; *balancing characters,* 28.
Defenses, *advantages,* 48; *encumbrance and,* 59; *flails and,* 59; *grappling and,* 59; *improving,* 57-58; *multiple attackers and,* 61; *options,* 57, 61; *overcoming,* 58; *stacking penalties,* 58; *weapons and,* 61; *see also Attacks, Combat*.
Defensive Attack maneuver, 57.
Defensive Feint combat option, 57.
Defensive Grip combat option, 57.
Die rolls, *see System Mechanics*.
Disadvantages, *body part,* 52; *choosing,* 12; *chronic conditions,* 52; *combat,* 52-53; *competing,* 12; *damage,* 53; *luck,* 53; *magic,* 53; *mental,* 52-53; *recovery,* 53; *self-control rolls,* 12; *senses,* 52; *social,* 13-14.
Dodge and Drop defense option, 57.
Dodging, 57, 61; *encumbrance and,* 44, 58, 59.
Dual-Weapon Attack combat option, 55, 56, 59.
Encounters, 23-26, 31, 37-38; *character traits and,* 24-25; *examples,* 33-35; *fun and,* 33; *player freedom,* 25-26; *variety in,* 24-25; *see also Adventures, Combat, Nonplayer Characters*.
Equipment, *catalogs,* 7; *encumbrance,* 59; *NPC,* 28; *PC,* 14; *size and,* 50; *see also Armor, Weapons*.
Evaluate maneuver, 54.
Explosions, 56.
Fantasy genre, 9; *in example adventure,* 18.
Feint maneuvers, 57, 58, 60.
Feverish Defense extra-effort option, 57.
Fiselli, 33.
Floor Plan 2: The Great Salt Flats, 43.
Flurry of Blows extra-effort option, 55, 56.
Gadgeteering, in campaigns, 14.
Game Masters (GM), *respecting,* 9; *role,* 37-39; *see also Adventures, Campaigns*.
Gear, *see Armor, Equipment, Weapons*.
Genre books, 6.
Genres, 9-10.
GM Control Sheet, 36.
Grabbing, 57.
Grappling, 57, 59.

Guards, *sample,* 28; *template,* 19.
GURPS, 4-19, 21, 23-28, 30, 37, 40-44, 49, 53-56, 59, 62; ***Action,*** 6, 9, 10, 51; ***Action 1: Heroes,*** 51; ***Action 2: Exploits,*** 25, 29, 43; ***Banestorm,*** 6, 7, 9; ***Basic Set,*** 4-12, 16-18, 23, 36, 41-43, 45, 51, 54, 56, 58, 59, 60; ***Big Lizzie,*** 7, 10; ***Bio-Tech,*** 7, 10; ***Caravan to Ein Arris,*** 7; ***Character Assistant,*** 8; ***City Stats,*** 7; ***Combat Cards,*** 36, 62; ***Creatures of the Night,*** 7, 9, 10; ***Crusades,*** 7; ***Dungeon Fantasy,*** 6, 9, 50; ***Dungeon Fantasy 1: Adventurers,*** 50; ***Dungeon Fantasy 3: The Next Level,*** 50; ***Dungeon Fantasy 13: Loadouts,*** 50; ***Dungeon Fantasy 14: Psi,*** 54; ***Dungeon Fantasy Adventure 1: Mirror of the Fire Demon,*** 7; ***Dungeon Fantasy Monsters,*** 7, 9, 10; ***Fantasy,*** 6, 9, 18; ***Fantasy-Tech 1: The Edge of Reality,*** 7, 9; ***GM's Screen,*** 36, 62; ***Gun Fu,*** 7, 10, 29, 43, 51; ***High-Tech,*** 6, 7, 9, 10, 45, 50, 51, 54, 56; ***Horror,*** 6, 10; ***Horror: The Madness Dossier,*** 7, 10; ***Hot Spots,*** 7, 9; ***Infinite Worlds,*** 5-7, 10; ***Lair of the Fat Man,*** 7; ***Loadouts,*** 7; ***Loadouts: Monster Hunters,*** 10; ***Locations,*** 7, 9; ***Locations: Tower of Octavius,*** 9; ***Low-Tech,*** 7, 9, 10, 18, 45, 50; ***Low-Tech Companion 2: Weapons and Warriors,*** 50; ***Magic,*** 7, 9, 10, 12, 18, 54, 57; ***Martial Arts,*** 4-7, 9, 10, 11, 18, 29, 30, 36, 40-46, 48, 51, 52, 54-61; ***Martial Arts: Gladiators,*** 7; ***Martial Arts: Technical Grappling,*** 57, 59; ***Mass Combat,*** 7, 10; ***Monster Hunters,*** 6, 10; ***Monster Hunters 3: The Enemy,*** 10; ***Mysteries,*** 6, 9, 10; ***Power-Ups,*** 7; ***Power-Ups 2: Perks,*** 54, 55; ***Power-Ups 5: Impulse Buys,*** 10, 14, 31; ***Powers,*** 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 14, 28, 43, 47-51; ***Powers: Divine Favor,*** 7, 9; ***Psionic Campaigns,*** 6, 10, 54; ***Psionic Powers,*** 7, 10, 54; ***Psi-Tech,*** 7; ***Psis,*** 7, 10, 54; ***Reign of Steel,*** 7; ***Reign of Steel: Will to Live,*** 7; ***Social Engineering,*** 7, 25, 40; ***Space,*** 6, 10; ***Spaceships,*** 7, 10; ***Supers,*** 6, 10, 12; ***Tactical Shooting,*** 7, 10, 13, 43, 54; ***Template Toolkit 1: Characters,*** 7, 16, 24; ***Thaumatology,*** 7, 9, 10, 12, 18, 49, 54; ***Thaumatology: Age of Gold,*** 7, 10; ***Transhuman Space,*** 7, 10; ***Traveller: Interstellar Wars,*** 7, 10; ***Ultra-Tech,*** 6, 7, 9, 10, 45, 50, 56; ***Zombies,*** 10; *see also* ***Cardboard Heroes, Floor Plan 2: The Great Salt Flats, Pyramid*** *Magazine*.
GURPS *for Dummies,* 8, 23, 36.
GURPS system mechanics, *see System Mechanics*.
Hit locations, 11, 56; *cover and,* 58.
Horror genre, 10.
Injury, *see Damage, Death*.
Jax, 20-21.
Kalee, 33.
Knockback, 60.
Kromm, 4.
Magic, *advantages,* 49-51; *combat and,* 53-54; *disadvantages,* 53; *in campaigns,* 14.
Maneuvers, *see Attacks, Combat, Defenses.*
Maps, hex, 43.
Mighty Blow extra-effort option, 56.
Military genre, 10.
Modern-action genre, 10.
Online resources, 8.
Nonplayer characters (NPCs), *combat balance,* 26-29, 33; *death,* 29; *designing,* 26-29; *examples,* 28, 32-33; *listing,* 31; *see also Characters.*
Size Modifier (SM), *combat and,* 50; *equipment and,* 50.
Skills, *choosing,* 12-13, 21-22, 24; *cinematic,* 10; *combat,* 44-47; *combat sets,* 46, 47; *comparison of unarmed combat,* 45; *encounters and,* 24-25; *generic combat styles,* 46-47; *gun,* 13; *Influence,* 15; *information gathering,* 25; *levels,* 12, 13; *NPC,* 28; *other useful,* 45-46; *recommended,* 21-22, 24, 46, 47; *room searches and,* 24; *routine use,* 13; *unarmed combat,* 44-45; *useful combat,* 44-47; *weapon,* 45.
Soldiers, sample, 28.
Spells, in combat, 54; *see also Magic*.
Stop Hit combat option, 60.
Superhero genre, 10.

Questioner: How do you deal with players who try to break the game?

Gabe: Lie to them. Rob them. Drive them mad. Concoct impossible scenarios whose only outcome is their death. And then, when their eyes glisten with shame and rage, drink their tears.

*– **Penny Arcade,** "DM 101"*

Parrying, 61.
Player characters (PCs), *see Characters.*
Posture, in combat, 57, 60.
Power levels, choosing, 11-12.
Powers, in campaigns, 14.
Practice matches, 43.
Prediction shots, 59.
Psionics, *advantages,* 49; *combat and,* 53-54; *disadvantages,* 53.
Punch, Sean, 4.
Pyramid magazine, 7, 8.
Rapid Strike combat option, 55, 56.
Resources for ***GURPS,*** 5-8.
Retreat defense option, 29, 57, 60.
Reversed Grip combat option, 56.
Riposte combat option, 60.
Robin's Laws of Good Gamemastering, 8, 23, 36.
Rory, 21.
Rulebooks, 6, 7.
Ruses, 60.
Scenes, *see Encounters*.
Science-fiction genre, 10.
Self-control rolls, competing, 12.
Shields, 57; *combat style,* 46-47; *skill,* 45.
Shock, 57; *see also Damage*.
Shoves, 60.
System mechanics, *as optional,* 4; *as tool kit,* 4; *cinematic,* 10; *combat options,* 29, 41-42; *encounters and,* 23-25; *fun and,* 33; *house rules,* 10; *resources for,* 5-8; *role of,* 10, 18; *task resolution,* 4, 11.
Tables, *unarmed combat skills,* 45.
Techniques, 47, 56; *cinematic,* 10; *see also Combat.*
Telegraphic Attack combat option, 54.
Templates, using, 16, 18; *see also Character Creation, Characters*.
Thugs, sample, 28, 33.
Tignis, Merchant, 32.
Time Use Sheet, 39.
Time-travel genre, 10.
Traveller, 7, 10.
Weapons, *basic loadouts,* 46-47; *basic styles,* 46-47; *breaking,* 57, 61; *catalogs,* 7; *combat and,* 14, 59; *disarming,* 57; *encumbrance,* 59; *ensnaring,* 57; *fencing,* 59, 61; *fighting with two,* 46-47, 55; *grabbing,* 57; *gun skills,* 13; *NPC,* 28; *parrying,* 61; *quality of,* 56; *ranged in close combat,* 57; *size and,* 50; *two-handed,* 46-47, 55, 61.
Western genre, 10.
Willem, 32.
Worldbooks, 6, 7.

Character Trait Index

360° Vision advantage, 49.
Acrobatics skill, 46.
Acute Senses advantage, 49.
Affliction advantage, 47.
Altered Time Rate advantage, 49.
Ambidexterity advantage, 47.
Arm ST advantage, 47.
Bad Back disadvantage, 52.
Bad Grip disadvantage, 52.
Bad Sight disadvantage, 52.
Berserk disadvantage, 52.
Binding advantage, 47.
Blind Fighting skill, 46.
Blindness disadvantage, 52.
Boxing skill, 44, 45.
Brawling skill, 44, 45.
Breaking Blow skill, 46.
Chronic Pain disadvantage, 52.
Claws advantage, 47.
Cloak skill, 45.
Code of Honor disadvantage, 53.
Combat Paralysis disadvantage, 53.
Combat Reflexes advantage, 48.
Constriction Attack advantage, 47.
Cowardice disadvantage, 53.
Cursed disadvantage, 53.
Damage Resistance (DR) advantage, 48.
Danger Sense advantage, 49.
Daredevil advantage, 49.
Dark Vision advantage, 49.
Deafness disadvantage, 52.
Decreased Time Rate disadvantage, 52.
Dexterity (DX) attribute, 44, 60; *shock and,* 57.
Dodge characteristic, *see Dodging in main index*.
Duplication advantage, 49.
Easy to Kill disadvantage, 53.
Energy Reserve advantage, 49.
Enhanced Defenses advantage, 48.
Enhanced Move advantage, 49.
Enhanced Time Sense advantage, 49.
Enhanced Tracking advantage, 49.
Epilepsy disadvantage, 52.
Extra Arms advantage, 48.
Extra Attack advantage, 48, 56.
Extra Life advantage, 48.
Fast-Draw skill, 46.
Fearlessness advantage, 48.
Fit advantage, 48.
Flashbacks disadvantage, 53.
Flexibility advantage, 48.
Flight advantage, 49.
Flying Leap skill, 46.
Fragile disadvantage, 53.
Growth advantage, 49.
Gunslinger advantage, 51.
Hard of Hearing disadvantage, 52.
Hard to Kill advantage, 48.
Hard to Subdue advantage, 48.
Hemophilia disadvantage, 53.
High Pain Threshold advantage, 48.
Hyperspectral Vision advantage, 49.
Immovable Stance skill, 46.
Influence skills, 15.
Infravision advantage, 49.
Injury Tolerance advantage, 48.
Innate Attack, *advantage,* 48; *skill,* 46.
Insubstantiality advantage, 49.
Judo skill, 45.
Karate skill, 45.
Kiai skill, 46.
Lame disadvantage, 52.
Leadership skill, 46.
Lifting ST advantage, 48.
Low Pain Threshold disadvantage, 52.
Luck advantage, 49.
Magery advantage, 50.
Magic Resistance advantage, 50.
Magic Susceptibility disadvantage, 53.
Mana Damper advantage, 50.
Mana Enhancer advantage, 50.
Mental Strength skill, 46.
Mind Control advantage, 50.
Missing Digit disadvantage, 52.
Night Blindness disadvantage, 52.
Night Vision advantage, 49.
No Depth Perception disadvantage, 52.
No Legs disadvantage, 52.
On the Edge disadvantage, 53.
One Arm disadvantage, 52.
One Eye disadvantage, 52.
One Hand disadvantage, 52.
Pacifism disadvantage, 53.
Parry Missile Weapons skill, 46.
Perfect Balance advantage, 49.
Peripheral Vision advantage, 49.
Permeation advantage, 49.
Phobias disadvantage, 53.
Post-Combat Shakes disadvantage, 53.
Power Blow skill, 46.
Pressure Points skill, 46.
Pressure Secrets skill, 46.
Push skill, 46.
Quadriplegic disadvantage, 52.
Rapid Healing advantage, 48.
Recovery advantage, 48.
Regeneration advantage, 48.
Regrowth advantage, 48.
Resistant advantage, 48.
Restricted Vision disadvantage, 52.
See Invisible advantage, 49.
Shadow Form advantage, 49.
Shapeshifting advantage, 49.
Shield skill, 45; *see also Shields in main index*.
Slippery advantage, 48.
Slow Healing disadvantage, 53.
Spines advantage, 48.
ST (Strength) attribute, 44.
Status trait, 13.
Striker advantage, 48.
Striking ST advantage, 48.
Sumo Wrestling skill, 45.
Super Jump advantage, 48.
Super Luck advantage, 49.
Supernatural Durability advantage, 48.
Supersensitive disadvantage, 53.
Susceptible disadvantage, 53.
Tactics skill, 46.
Teeth advantage, 48.
Telekinesis advantage, 50, 57; *in combat,* 51.
Terror advantage, 51.
Trained by a Master advantage, 51-52.
Ultravision advantage, 49.
Unfazeable advantage, 48.
Unfit disadvantage, 52.
Unhealing disadvantage, 53.
Unkillable advantage, 48.
Unluckiness disadvantage, 53.
Vampiric Bite advantage, 48.
Very Fit advantage, 48.
Very Rapid Healing advantage, 48.
Very Unfit disadvantage, 52.
Vibration Sense advantage, 49.
Vulnerability disadvantage, 53.
Walk on Air advantage, 49.
Walk on Liquid advantage, 49.
Warp advantage, 49.
Weak Bite disadvantage, 52.
Weakness disadvantage, 53.
Wealth trait, 13.
Weapon Bond perk, 54.
Weapon Master advantage, 52, 56.
Wounded disadvantage, 52.
Wrestling skill, 45.
Zen Archery skill, 46.

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– Steve Jackson

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